

Analytical Study of the Prasthānatrayī Svāminarāyaṇa Bhāṣya in Light of Svāminarāyaṇa's Vacanāmṛta

*A Thesis Submitted to
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in Sanskrit*

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DECEMBER - 2021**



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Sadhu Gyanananddas has pursued the Ph.D. programme in Sanskrit in the Department of Sanskrit, Pali & Prakrit. He has written the present thesis entitled “*Analytical Study of the Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya in Light of Svāminārāyaṇa’s Vacanāmṛta*” for the degree of Ph.D. in Sanskrit under my guidance.

I undersigned has reviewed and went through all the pages of the thesis. In my capacity as academic supervisor of the candidate, the research work is unique and fulfills the norms mentioned by the UGC.

The work mentioned above is all about the *Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana* (*Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśan*) based on the *Prasthānatrayī* and is not submitted anywhere else for obtaining any degree or diploma from any university or institution.

I forward his thesis with best wishes.

Professor Dr. Rabindra Kumar Panda

DECLARATION

Hereby, I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. Due references have been provided on all supporting literatures and resources.

This research work was conducted under the guidance of professor Prof. Dr. Rabindra Kumar Panda, Department of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit, faculty of arts, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

First of all, I wish to express my salutation to my Guru HDH Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja, who had identified my strength in the field of study, research, and writing skills. He was the first person on earth who had told me to conduct Ph.D. right after my *Bhagavatī Dikṣā*. However, at that time, I knew nothing about the Indian Vedic tradition. Therefore, I accomplished a master's degree in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta. After Pramukha Svāmī left his mortal body, Then Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja, the spiritual successor of Pramukha Svāmī and present Akṣarabrahman Guru blessed and encouraged me for the task. On Friday, February 2019, at 1.30 pm, he put his both divine hands on my head and opened the way to enroll myself as a research candidate in Maharaja Sayyajirao University, Baroda. For these reasons, I dedicate this work to both of my Gurus: Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja and Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja, without whose blessings and inspiration this thesis would not have been possible. Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa is the real source of my life and my thesis. His unique teachings and interpretations of the Vedic texts are the foundation of this research work. Only because of his gracious and divine appearance on this world were the principles of the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* revealed.

The BAPS Svāminārāyaṇa Mandira at Sārangapura, all of the faculty at both the training center and the BAPS Sanskrit Mahāvidyālaya and the administration of the *mandira* complex have been also been supportive. Among them, I would like to particularly remember and express my regard for P. Jñāneśvara Svāmī, P. Nārāyaṇamuni Svāmī, P. Akṣaracaraṇa Svāmī, P. Ātmatṛpta Svāmī and my batchmate Sādhus for endorsing me for the last several years and providing for my needs.

Most importantly, I must express my very profound gratitude to my guide, Professor Dr. Rabindra Panda. His insightful and prudent advice proved to be extremely helpful in preparing my thesis. He has provided me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been so fruitful without his proper guidance. Meetings and discussions with him have significantly impacted my investigation, organization, and presentation of the ideas that I discuss in this work. He is a great scholar of classical Sanskrit grammar, Vedanta, literature and *Nyāya* at the same time the profound master of western philosophy and English language. I especially express my vote of thanks to P. Sādhū Dharmasetudāsa (former graduate of Rutgers University, New Jersey) who meticulously read the thesis and suggested grammatical corrections.

I am highly grateful to all the faculties and staff members of the Department of Sanskrit, Pali and Prakrit and Oriental Institute, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda for helping me at the time of collecting data from the institute library and enriching me with some important research works. Among them, I would like to thank Mr. Vipul Patel, who served as a bridge to walk on to the university.

Finally, I am highly indebted to Sādhū Bhadreśadāsa, on whose work my entire thesis depends. Since the beginning of my stay here in Sārangapura, Svāmī Bhadreśadāsa has been an unfailing, encouraging, and supportive mentor. His lessons in Sanskrit, *Nyāya*, verbal expositions of his Sanskrit commentaries, and readiness to discuss readings of the text was an invaluable resource. It was a great privilege to have learned and discussed the expositions of the commentaries with its author. Perhaps, future generations will be covetous of having had such an opportunity. I am also grateful for his envisioning the project. It was by his suggestion that I had originally outlined the idea of this work. I remember and thank all the well-wishers who have helped me directly or indirectly.

PREFACE

Avatāravāda is a unique characteristic of Hinduism. In this way, *Avatārī* Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa incarnated in the village Chapīyā in Uttara Pradeśa on 3 April 1781 (*Caitra Śukla 9, Samvata 1837*). In 1792, at the age of 11 years, he left his home and began a seven-year pilgrimage across India. After 7 years and 11 months, he settled in the modern-day Indian state of Gujarāta 1799. In 1800, he was initiated and took *Bhagavatī dikṣā* in the Rāmānanda Svāmī's *sampradāya*. The Guru, Svāmī Rāmānanda, handed over the helm of the *sampradāya* and made him his successor in 1802. During his lifetime, Svāminārāyaṇa preached his unique teachings to his followers. Throughout his travels, he explained the principle of becoming *akṣararūpa* and offering *upāsanā* to Puruṣottama.

He revealed the existence of the following five eternally distinct ontological entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. He did not encounter a single *sampradāya* that believed in the existence of five eternally distinct entities or the principle of becoming *akṣararūpa* and offering *bhakti* to Puruṣottama. Along with it the form and nature of Akṣarabrahman, *īśvara* as a distinct entity from Brahman and Parabrahman, etc. are the matchless principles found in the history of the Vedānta tradition. Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings were based on the ancient Indian scriptures and he propagated his principles using direct references from these texts. All his teachings were compiled in his time and preserved in a written form. This compilation is known as the *Vacanāmṛta*.

In this manner, Svāminārāyaṇa provides a unique, unprecedented contribution to Vedic knowledge. His successors, Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānda Svāmī and Brahmasvarūpa Bhagatajī Mahārāja, continued this legacy. Brahmasvarūpa Śāstrījī Mahārāja (Śāstrī Yajñapurūṣadāsa, the third successor of Svāminārāyaṇa) had given the name of Svāminārāyaṇa's teaching as '*Akṣara Puruṣottama Darśana*'. He

propagated this *Darśana* by using terms such as *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Upāsanā* and *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Siddhānta*. In addition to conveying the *Darśana*'s teachings, he also created the *mandiras* in which he consecrated *mūrtis* of both Puruṣottama and Akṣarabrahman. Thereafter, Brahmasvarūpa Yogījī Mahārāja and Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja spread Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's teaching throughout the world.

In Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja's time, through his blessings, after two hundred years of Svāminārāyaṇa's time, Bhadreśadāsa a Sādhu has authored a commentary (*Bhāṣya*) on the *Prasthānatrayī*. Today, Pragaṭa Brahmasvarūp Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja is enriching devotees with these *darśanic* principles. This *darśana* is also known as '*Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana*'. This work is correlating the principles of Svāminārāyaṇa described in the *Vacanāmṛta* with the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya*.

ABSTRACT

Parabrahman Puruṣottama Svāminārāyaṇa offered novel contributions to the Vedānta philosophical tradition by presenting the principles of the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Siddhānta* (doctrine) and establishing the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*, and an independent *Vedāntika* school of thought. Although Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings were based on the Vedic principles yet, Svāminārāyaṇa did not commission the writings of *Bhāṣya* or commentary on the *Prasthānatrayī* (*Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavatgītā*, and the *Brahmasūtras*) in his time. Nevertheless, in his time, his teachings had been compiled by five senior *sādhus*. This compilation is known as the *Vacanāmṛta*.¹ Two centuries later, commentaries (henceforth *Bhāṣya*) in the Svāminārāyaṇa School were written and unequivocally acclaimed. The author of the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa claims that this *Bhāṣya*, on the *Prasthānatrayī*, represents the eternal Vedic ideology proclaimed by Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa. Essentially, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa has evidently elucidated all his fundamental philosophical principles in his *Vacanāmṛta*. The *Vacanāmṛta* is the most authentic scripture of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* faith. It is a historical monument that is compiled in front of Svāminārāyaṇa's eyes.

When we talk about the principles, which were given by Svāminārāyaṇa two hundred years ago, are authored today into the scholastic way on the base of *Prasthānatrayī*, it provokes many issues regarding the authenticity of the teaching of Svāminārāyaṇa and the principles shaped by the Bhāṣyakāra according to the *Prasthānatrayī*. Since the period of two hundred years is enough to change the phenomenon of social, religious, and moral aspects of any particular region. Consequently, these changes can also be perceived in the various other writings which are stood at two different and vast time zone.

¹ We will provide a profound introduction of the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* after a few pages.

This thesis comparatively analyzes the principles between the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* of Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa to determine to what proportion the *Bhāṣya* accords with the principles of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa encoded in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Therefore, by critically analyzing Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa's commentaries in light of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta*, this thesis intends to bring forth a valid conclusion.

Now, these days the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya* is the most growing faith across the world. Hundreds of thousands of numbers of devotees are following the principles of the *Sampradāya*. A vast literature has been written and enormous research has been conducted on *Svāminārāyaṇaism* in India and abroad. However, much of the research up to now has been descriptive in nature. Moreover, this work is limited to providing some explanations on some particular topic of the work. In addition to this, this literature is unable to present the entire picture of *Svāminārāyaṇa* faith on accordance with the *darśanika* factors which are based on the *Prasthānatrayī Śāstras*. It was a big gap in that field of research, so there was an urgent need to address this demand and be fulfilled.

I am very fortunate because, for the first time in the history of *Svāminārāyaṇa* faith, I received the opportunity to fulfill the gap. When the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* was published during 2007-2012, an imperious requirement arose to match the original Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings (the *Vacanāmṛta*) with the novel *Bhāṣyas*. Finally, I was chosen to match both scriptures in an analytical way. This thesis is indeed investigating whether the novel Bhāṣyakāra is following the Svāminārāyaṇa's teaching or not. We will examine this by dividing the work into four parameters: 1. On the Basis of Epistemology 2. On the Basis of Metaphysics 3. On the Basis of Spiritual Practice and 4. On the Basis of Liberation.

System of Writing:

Italics: This research work is based on two major scriptures: the *Prasthānatrayī* and the *Vacanāmṛta*. The first part covers some of the world's oldest Sanskrit texts such as the *Upaniṣad*, *Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtra*. The second part is considered the oldest Gujarati prose. However, they all possess a different language than my thesis language; thus the sheer number of their occurrence will raise the difficulty for the readers. Therefore, I have chosen to italicize Sanskrit and Gujarati words or titles of key sources.

Translation: Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Sanskrit and Gujarati works are my own. For the *Vacanāmṛta*, I used the Gujarati edition, published in Dec 2003 with detailed footnotes and appendices (700 pages).² Within the body of this work, after citing the original Sanskrit lines, I have put the translation in the inverted comma first, then explanation and argumentation follow. Sometimes, if necessary, I have provided a detailed explanation of the particular Sanskrit or Gujarati words which have the special meaning in the *sampradāya* to understand, such as *apopu* (Gujarati) or *ātmaghātī* (Sanskrit). Again at the end of the thesis in the appendix, a list of Gujarati and Sanskrit words with their English translation is furnished.

Transliteration: To read, pronunciation, and understand the Sanskrit and Gujarati words perfectly, I have used the standard scheme established by the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Translation for *Devanāgarī* script (IAST). To indicate plurality, however, I have taken the conjugate base nouns in both Sanskrit and Gujarati according to English grammar rules. For instance, the plural or *ṛkṣa* is written as *ṛkṣas* (meaning trees). Also, when necessary, I have applied English suffixes to

² The reason to take this version of the *Vacanāmṛta* is the familiarity of the pages and paragraphs since I had memorized the entire *Vacanāmṛta* of 700 pages in 2005.

Samskr̥ta and Gujarati words to form modifiers such as *māyic*, *śāstrika*, *sāmpradāyika*, *brahmika*, etc. Their lexical forms follow English conventions rather than those of Sanskrit or Gujarati. For instance, Vedic, yogic, and *Upaniṣadic*, rather than *Vedika*, *Yaugikā*, and *Aupaniṣadika*, as they would be otherwise. I have generally not ventured much beyond adjectives, though this rule could easily be extended to adverbs and form useful terms such as *yogically*, *sāmpradāyikally*, and others.

Capitalization: I have made some special capitalization to emphasize words like: The Guru: Here, The Guru is used to indicate the Brahamasvarūpa Akṣarabrahma Guru, by whom God manifest on earth. The Bhāṣyakara: this term is used for only *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakara Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa*.

Abbreviations: Frequently used titles of key scriptures as the *Upaniṣad*, *Gītā*, *Brahmasūtra*, *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya*, the *Vacanāmṛta*, and other major sections have been abbreviated as below when used in citations and sometimes within the text.

AU	<i>Aitareya Upaniṣad</i>
AUSB	<i>Aitareya Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa- Bhāṣya</i> (This style is used for all of the <i>Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya</i> , ex. MUSB for <i>Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa- Bhāṣya</i> and so on)
BG	<i>Bhagavad-Gītā</i>
BGSB	<i>Bhagavad-Gītā Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya</i>
BP	<i>Bhāgavata-Purāṇa</i>
BS	<i>Brahmasūtras</i>
BSSB	<i>Brahmasūtra Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya</i>
BU	<i>Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad</i>
CU	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>

IU	<i>Īśa Upaniṣad</i>
KU	<i>Katha Upaniṣad</i>
KeU	<i>Kena Upaniṣad</i>
MāU	<i>Māndūkya Upaniṣad</i>
MU	<i>Mundaka Upaniṣad</i>
PU	<i>Praśna Upaniṣad</i>
SB	<i>Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya</i>
SU	<i>Svetāśvatara Upaniṣad</i>
SV	<i>Svāmīnī Vāto</i>
TU	<i>Taittiriya Upaniṣad</i>
Vac. Amd.	<i>Vacanāmṛta Amdāvād</i>
Vac. Gadh.1	<i>Vacanāmṛta Gadhadā I</i>
Vac. Gadh.2	<i>Vacanāmṛta Gadhadā II</i>
Vac. Gadh.3	<i>Vacanāmṛta Gadhadā III</i>
Vac. Jet.	<i>Vacanāmṛta Jetalapura</i>
Vac. Kār.	<i>Vacanāmṛta Kāriyānī</i>
Vac. Loyā	<i>Vacanamrut Loyā</i>
Vac. Pan.	<i>Vacanāmṛta Pancālā</i>
Vac. Sār.	<i>Vacanāmṛta Sārangpur</i>
Vac. Var.	<i>Vacanāmṛta Vartāl</i>
VR	<i>Vedarasa</i>
Vac. Rah.	<i>Vacanāmṛta Rahasya</i>
SSSK	<i>Svāminārāyaṇa Siddhāntasudhā Kārikā</i>
SS	<i>Sāmkhya Sūtra</i>
YS	<i>Yoga Sūtra</i>
NS	<i>Nyāya Sūtra</i>
JS	<i>Jaiminī Sūtra</i>
VS	<i>Vaiśeṣika Sūtra</i>
SK	<i>Sāmkhyakārikā</i>

Referencing: For sources such as the *Vacanāmṛta*, *Svāminī Vāto*, the *Upaniṣads*, *Brahmasūtras*, *Gītā*, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, other *Darśana Sūtras*, I have adhered to the Indian tradition of noting their section, chapter and verse or aphorism. I have provided references to applicable primary sources using the following method: placing an abbreviated title of the text followed by its pertinent chapter, sub-chapter, and verse number. I have done this to accommodate those familiar with the traditional method of referencing and more practically, to aid the reader to quickly find the quoted text in an alternative, available published version of the text. However, when the exact quotation is written from the *Vacanāmṛta*, the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya*, *Prasthānatrayī* texts and *Svāminārāyaṇa Siddhāntasudhā* I intentionally marked the page number with their respective section number, chapter number, and verse number right after the quotation on the main page. This helps to understand the philosophical flow of the thesis rather than to put all references in the footnote. This becomes very useful in a case where a single verse of the *Bhāṣya* is enunciated in length and it covers many pages. I have mentioned all the publishing information of the book or the scriptures whom I have used to cite the references directly or indirectly, including author, book's name, page number, publisher, publishing year, version etc., except those few old books which miss this information partly.

Methods of Analysis: The potential audience of this work is expected to be varied in terms of their familiarity with the *Upaniṣads*, *Gītā*, *Brahmasūtra*, and the *Vacanāmṛta*. Moreover, the languages of the related texts should be considered as a key factor to understand the substratum of the thesis. Addressing such diversity requires not only a balance between a thorough elucidation of readings and concepts and the economy of language but also a continual awareness and the need for an exposition of the subtle interpretive forces underlying the act of translation. Additionally, and quite related, is keeping in mind the audience's different

perspectives about the meaning, intent, and philosophy of the *Prasthānatrayī* that are influenced by different renderings of the texts and its subsequent works.

Because the *Prasthānatrayī* is considered to be an authoritative philosophical and sacred theological text, many modern and traditional commentators have sought its authority to substantiate their respective schools of thought. Finally, the *Akṣarapurūṣottama Darśana*, being a novel *darśana*, the lack of its accessible robust philosophical literature on it was also a challenge. Indian thought is typical. When engaging with it, one often experiences an unfamiliarity with its language, texts, topics of discussion, concepts, and sometimes even its ends. Rādhākṛṣṇana and Moore explain this convergence when they say, “The basic texts of Indian philosophy treat not only one phase of experience and reality but of the full content of the philosophic sphere. Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, religion, psychology, facts, and value are not cut off one from the other but are treated in their natural unity as aspects of one life and experience or of a single comprehensive reality.”³

Rādhākṛṣṇana says further that the Indian traditional way is the best way to find the answer to the Indian philosophical questions. Differences in categorization, methodology, types of problems, and emphasis require the understanding of Indian thought using its own terms and judged by its own methods. In this manner, in terms of methodology, I am treading on our ancient traditional Indian path.

I wish to mention that this thesis highlights the Svāminārāyaṇa School only. Although it is a novel *darśana*, and new readers and outsiders find it difficult to understand, therefore in my introductory chapter, I have explained the *Svāminārāyaṇa* history, tradition, faith, customs, norms, system, doctrines, and the *guruparamparā*. Though it has become a little lengthy, yet it was most significant

³ Rādhākṛṣṇana and Moore, a source book of Indian philosophy xxix, Princeton university Press, April, 1967

to understand such deep traditional thoughts. Here, I mention the basic points of the thesis study guide:

1. The entire thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is an introductory chapter. Then I divide the work into four parameters: 1. On the Basis of Epistemology 2. On the Basis of Metaphysics 3. On the Basis of Spiritual Practice and 4. On the Basis of Liberation. The last chapter is the conclusion of the entire thesis.
2. Topics and subtopics are formed according to the basic philosophical factors of *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition.
3. Each and every topic or subtopic is explained in length to the extent of its complexity. I have used sometime philology and hermeneutics also in need to explain some particular words.
4. Then I bring the torch of the Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta*. After providing the direct quotation of the *Vacanāmṛta*, I explain the context of it.
5. Then *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* follows on that particular topic. In this, I highlight the fundamental essence of the *Bhāṣya*.
6. Then analysis starts of both these scriptures.
7. After discussion and argumentation, we reach a definite conclusion. In short, this research is analytical as far as the research type is concerned. It includes four factors for analysis; epistemology, metaphysics, spiritual practice, and soteriology. The scope of the research reaches the two prominent scriptures of the Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya; the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya*. The research method compares both scriptures based on some specific principles with the help of the ancient Indian Vedic process.

A vast literature of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya* has been reviewed for the research which includes all the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas*, *Vacanāmṛta*, *Vacanāmṛtarahasya* five volumes, biographies of Svāminārāyaṇa and Gurus, and many more books written on the *Vacanāmṛta*. In the beginning, the null

hypothesis was set that the principles described in both scriptures have no relation.

The work is not about :

1. This work is not a systematic commentary of the *Prasthānatrayī*.
2. This work is not just a compilation that accumulates all the references of the *Prasthānatrayī* on a particular topic or subtopic.
3. This text also does not embrace the methods of a persuasive essay in that it does not attempt to convince the reader to accept any particular interpretation.
4. This work is not an exercise of comparative philosophical study with other schools of Indian philosophies.
5. The work does not claim for a particular interpretation as being correct and others as being flawed, even after applying the perfect methods.
6. The research work is not just a translation of the Gujarati text and *Prasthānatrayī* text.
7. The work ignores the western methods of interpretation of Indian text.

VISION

स्वामिनारायणं नौमि सिद्धान्तस्थापकं पुरा।
वन्दे महन्तस्वामिनं सुसिद्धान्तप्रवर्तकम् ॥
सिद्धान्तोयमपूर्वोस्ति श्रुतिस्मृतिनिगर्भितः ।
दर्शितः शास्त्रिराजेन सिद्धान्तभास्करेण स ॥
स्वामिनारायणोक्तो यः सुसिद्धान्तो वचनामृतो।
पुनश्च गुरुभिर्नित्यं स्वोपदेशे प्रबोधितः॥
दृष्ट्वा नूतनभाष्ये तं स्वामिनारायणस्य मुहुः।
प्रबन्धलेखने बुद्ध्या विश्लेषणं कृतं द्वयोः ॥

I bow to Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa, who has established the principles (*Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*) earlier, I bow to Guru Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja also who promulgated the principles. However, Śāstrījī Mahārāja (the third successor of Svāminārāyaṇa) had already shown these unique principles to the world, which had been hidden in the *Śrutis* and *Smṛtis*, as the sun shines the world with its bright rays. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's principles were compiled in the *Vacanāmṛta*, and Guru *Paramparā* installed these principles in the hearts of devotees. Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa authored the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya*- an extensive commentary based on the Vedic text that substantiates Bhagwan Svāminārāyaṇa's original principles. This thesis offers an analysis of both texts, the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* and the *Vacanāmṛta*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
CERTIFICATE.....	ii
DECLARATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	iv
PREFACE.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	viii
VISION.....	xvii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xviii
CHAPTER – 1	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. Vedic <i>Darśana</i> Tradition	1
2. <i>Darśana</i>	2
2.1 <i>Sāṃkhya Darśana</i>	2
2.2 <i>Yoga Darśana</i>	3
2.4 <i>Vaiśeṣika Darśana</i>	5
2.5 <i>Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana:</i>	6
2.6 <i>Vedānta Darśana</i>	7
2.6.1 Branches of the Vedānta <i>Darśana</i>	7
2.6.1.1 <i>Advaitā Darśana</i> (Ādi Śaṅkarācārya)	8
2.6.1.2 <i>Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana</i> (Rāmānujācārya).....	8
2.6.1.3 <i>Dvaita Darśana</i> (Madhvācārya).....	9
2.6.1.4 <i>Dvaitādvaita Darśana</i> (Nimbārkaācārya)	10
2.6.1.5 <i>Śuddha Advaitā Darśana</i> (Vallabhācārya).....	11
2.6.1.6 <i>Acintyabhedābheda Darśana</i> (Caitanya Mahāprabhu)	12
3. Vedic <i>Darśana</i> Tradition and the <i>Prasthānatrayī Śāstras</i>	13
3.1 What are <i>Śāstras</i> ?	13
3.2 <i>Prasthānatrayī</i>	13
3.2.1 The First <i>Prasthāna</i> : The Upaniṣads	14
3.2.2 The Second <i>Prasthāna</i> : <i>Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā</i>	15
3.2.3 The Third <i>Prasthāna</i> : The <i>Brahmasūtras</i>	16

4. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and His Tradition.....	17
4.1 Life and Work of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa	17
4.2 In Gujarat.....	19
4.3 Unique Prayer	20
4.4 Purity in Festival.....	21
4.5 Women's Upliftment	22
4.6 <i>Sādhus</i> of Svāminārāyaṇa.....	23
4.7 Savior of Gujarat	24
4.8 Philosophy	25
4.8.1 An Introduction to the <i>Vacanāmṛta</i>	26
4.8.2 A Historical Document	27
4.8.4 Method of Discussion.....	28
4.8.5 Preaching Through a Profound Experience	28
5. Guruparampara in Svāminārāyaṇa Faith: A Live Philosophy	29
5.1 Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja	29
5.2 Bhagatī Mahārāja	30
5.3 Śāstrījī Mahārāja.....	30
5.4 Yogījī Mahārāja.....	31
5.5 Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja	31
5.6 Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja	32
6. <i>Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya</i>	32
6.1 The <i>Bhāṣya</i> Tradition	32
6.2.1 Sādhu Bhadrēśadāsa (the Commentator or <i>Bhashyakara</i>)	33
6.2.2 The <i>Prasthānatrayī- Svāminārāyaṇa - Bhāṣya</i>	34
6.2.3 Characteristics of the Commentary.....	35
6.2.4 <i>Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā</i>	38
6.2.5 Opinions:	39
7. Conclusion	40
 CHAPTER – 2	 42
ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF EPISTEMOLOGY.....	42

1. <i>Pramāṇamimāṃsā</i> (Epistemology)	42
1.1 Epistemology in Vedic Tradition:	42
1.2 Acceptance of <i>Pramāṇa</i> in Various <i>Darśana</i> Traditions:	43
1.3 <i>Pramāṇas</i> : Basic Introduction	44
1.3.1 Perception	44
1.3.2 Inference	45
1.3.3 Verbal Testimony	45
1.3.4 Analogy and Similarity	45
1.3.5 Presumption	46
1.3.6 Non-cognition	46
1.3.7 Suppositional Reasoning	47
2. Analysis	47
3. <i>Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ</i>	49
4. <i>Pramāṇas</i> in the <i>Svāminārāyaṇa</i> School.....	52
4.1 Numbers of <i>Pramāṇa</i>	52
4.2 <i>Laukika Pramāṇas</i> Fail to Realize Eternal Entities	53
4.3 The In-contaminate Source of Knowledge	57
4.3.1 The cause of <i>Pramāṇa</i> and <i>Pramā</i>	57
4.3.2 Parabrahman's Innermost Will	61
4.4 Grace to <i>Pramāṇas</i> : The Divine Birth on Earth	63
4.4.1 Perception	67
3.4.1.1 The Divine Sight	71
3.4.1.2 Imperceptible Became Perceptible	74
4.4.2 Inference	75
3.4.2.1 Importance of Inference	76
3.4.2.2 The Limitations	77
3.4.2.3 Logic is not Everything.....	80
4.4.3 Verbal Testimony	84
4.4.3.1 Significance of Verbal Testimony.....	84
3.4.3.2 The Vedic Texts.....	85
3.4.3.3 The Most Authentic Scripture – The <i>Vacanāmṛta</i>	87

3.4.3.4 A Tribute to Veda Vyāsa	89
3.4.3.5 Āpta-Vākya Pramāṇam	91
3.4.3.6 Unknowable Becomes Knowable.....	92
3.4.3.7 The Guru Who Interprets the Śabda	95
4.4.4 Analogy	99
3.4.4.1 A Simple Way to Understand	100
3.4.4.1.1 In the <i>Brahmasūtra</i> -	101
3.4.4.1.2 In the <i>Upaniṣad</i> :	101
3.4.4.1.3 In the <i>Gītā</i>	102
5. <i>Pramā</i>	105
5.1 What is <i>Pramā</i> ?	105
5.2 Realistic Epistemology.....	106
5.4 Classification of Ultimate <i>Pramā</i>	110
5.5 The Process of Attaining Knowledge	112
6. The Ultimate Knowers.....	114
7. <i>Khyāti</i>	115
7.1 <i>Cid-Acid Khyāti</i>	116
7.2 <i>Cid Khyāti</i>	117
7.3 <i>Acid Khyāti</i>	119
8. Conclusion of the Analysis.....	122
 CHAPTER 3	125
ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF METAPHYSICS	125
1. JĪVA	128
1.2 Different from the Body	131
1.3 Ātman-Body Relation	133
1.4 The Nature and Form of the <i>Jīva</i> ?	134
1.5 Multiplicity and Atomicity.....	136
1.6 Atomic size.....	137
1.7 Dependency.....	138
1.8 Is the <i>Jīva</i> a Component (<i>Aṃśa</i>) of Parabrahman?	139

2. ĪŚVARA	140
2.1 Common Characteristics of <i>Jīvas</i> and <i>Īśvaras</i>	141
2.2 Distinction.....	142
Īśvara's form	143
2.3 <i>Īśvaras</i> ' Bondage	143
2.4 How <i>Īśvaras</i> Work:	144
2.5 The Relation Between <i>Īśvaras</i> and Parabrahman	145
3.1 <i>Māyā</i> is Real.....	149
3.2 Three <i>Guṇas</i> of <i>Māyā</i>	150
3.3 Insentiency and Sentiency	151
3.4 Eternal and Indistinct.....	152
3.5 Material Bedrock of All Beings and Things.....	153
3.6 Power of Parabrahman	153
3.7 Ignorance	154
3.8 <i>Māyā</i> and the Creation of the Universes.....	155
3.8.1 The Real Creator and Cause	158
3.8.2 Purpose of the Creation	159
3.8.3 Sustenance	160
3.8.4 Dissolution	161
4. AKṢARABRAHMAN	164
4.1 Akṣarabrahman is not Parabrahman.....	167
4.1.1 The <i>Upaniṣad</i>	169
4.1.2 The <i>Brahmasūtra</i>	172
4.1.3 The <i>Bhagavad-Gītā</i>	173
4.2 The Nature of Brahman	175
4.2.1 The Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer of the Universe	175
4.2.1 <i>Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam</i>	177
4.3 Forms of Akṣarabrahman.....	177
4.3.1 Akṣarabrahman as <i>Cidākāśa</i>	179
4.3.2 Akṣarabrahman as Parabrahman's Abode	183
4.3.3 Akṣarabrahman as <i>Sevaka</i> in Akṣaradhāma	189

4.3.4 Akṣarabrahman as <i>Brahmasvarūpa</i> Guru	191
5. PARABRAHMAN.....	197
5.1 One Without Second.....	197
5.2 <i>Sarvoparī</i> : Parabrahman as Supreme.....	198
5.2.1 Lord and <i>Ātman</i> of All Beings	198
5.2.2 Source of All <i>Avatāras</i>	203
5.3 <i>Kartā</i> : Parabrahman as Omni-agent.....	206
5.3.1 Parabrahman is the All-Doer and All-Cause.....	206
5.3.2 Efficient Cause and Material Cause	208
5.3.3 All-doer Still Non-doer	213
5.4 <i>Sākāra</i> : Parabrahman as Having Form.....	214
5.4.1 Eternal Form.....	215
5.4.2 Parabrahman in Human-Like Form	216
5.4.3 Parabrahman Possesses a Human Form yet Divine.....	220
5.5 <i>Pragaṭa</i> : Parabrahman as Manifest	224
5.5.1 The Uniqueness of the Manifestation	226
6. Conclusion.....	228
 CHAPTER – 4	229
ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF SPIRITUAL ENDEAVOUR.....	229
1. Spiritual Endeavor (<i>Sāadhanā</i>)	230
2. Grace and Self-Effort	232
3. <i>Brahmavidyā</i>	238
3.1 Knowledge for Information and Knowledge for Transformation	240
4. <i>Brahmabhāva</i>	242
4.1 Oneness with the <i>Brahmasvarūpa</i> Guru.....	243
5. The Role of the Guru in <i>Sāadhanā</i>	246
5.1 Ideal for <i>Sāadhanā</i>	247
5.2 To Attain <i>Brahmabhāva</i>	248
5.4 For the Supreme Devotion Towards Parabrahman.....	250
5.5 To Understand the <i>Śāstras</i>	251

5.6 The Way to Serve the Guru	252
5.7 Warning	254
5.8 Is the Guru the Ultimate Goal?	255
6. Śaraṇāgati (Refuge)	257
6.1 Guru-śaraṇāgati.....	260
6.2 The Process of <i>Āśrayagrahaṇa</i>	262
6.3 Is <i>Āśrayagrahaṇa</i> Important?	265
7. Upāsanā.....	267
7.1 The meaning of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama <i>Upāsanā</i>	270
7.2 What to Understand in <i>Upāsanā</i>	273
7.2.1 Guṇātītānanda is Akṣarabrahman	273
7.2.2 Puruṣottama's Self Revelation.....	274
8. Physical <i>Sādhana</i>	274
8.1 <i>Niyamas</i>	276
8.2 <i>Sevā</i>	279
8.3 Austerities	281
9. <i>Dikṣā</i>	282
9.1 <i>Dikṣita</i> Housholder's <i>Niyamas</i>	282
9.1.1 Meat Eating	283
9.1.2 Liquor	283
9.1.3 Theft	284
9.1.4 Addictions	284
9.1.5 Adultery	285
9.2 <i>Dikṣita</i> Renunciate's <i>Niyamas</i>	285
9.3 Relaxation in the Observance of <i>Niyamas</i>	288
9.4 Atonement.....	289
10. Bhakti (Devotion-Worship).....	290
10.1 Intense Love Due to Glory	292
10.2 The Way to Learn <i>Bhakti</i>	293
10.3 <i>Bhakti</i> Purifies the Self	296
10.4 <i>Pativrata-Bhakti</i>	298

11. <i>Ekāntiki Bhakti</i>	301
11.1 Components of <i>Ekāntiki-Bhakti</i>	308
11.1.1 <i>Dharma</i>	308
9.1.1.1 Novel Contribution Towards Varṇa-Āśrama	310
11.1.2 <i>Jñāna</i>	312
9.1.2.1 Ātmaniṣṭhā Alone is Not Sufficient	313
11.1.3 <i>Vairāgya</i>	315
12. <i>Satsaṅga: Sādhana</i> for Daily Life	318
12.1 <i>Satsaṅga</i>	318
12.2 Virtues Helpful in Spiritual Progress	322
12.3 <i>Śraddhā</i> (Patience, Faith)	324
12.4 <i>Sravaṇādi-Sopānas</i> (Steps for Grasping Knowledge)	324
12.5 <i>Viveka</i> (Discernment)	325
12.6 <i>Gunagrāhaka-Drṣṭi</i> (Perceiving Virtues of Others)	326
12.7 <i>Antardṣṭi</i> (Introspection)	326
12.8 <i>Divyabhāva</i> (Divinity)	327
12.9 <i>Niṣkapaṭabhāva</i> (Undeceptfulness)	328
12.10 Prayer	329
13. Conclusion	329
 CHAPTER - 5	331
ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF SOTERIOLOGY	331
1. The Threefold Pains	332
2. The General Conception of <i>Mokṣa</i>	334
3. The Ultimate Goal	335
4. Mukti Mimāṃsā in the Svāminārāyaṇa School	336
4.1 The Nature of Bondage	341
4.2 The Nature of Liberation	345
5. Does <i>Jīva</i> Become Akṣarabrahman Through This Oneness?	350
5.1 An Objection	352
5.2 The Response	353

5.3 Qualitative Similarity	355
5.4 Possessing <i>Brahmabhāva</i>	355
5.5 Intense Adoration	355
5.6 Summary.....	356
5.7 The True Intention of <i>Sāmānādhikaranya</i>	356
5.8 The Semantics of ‘Being Brahman’	357
5.9 The Semantics of <i>Atmarūpa</i>	358
5.10 The Various Semantics of ‘ <i>Eva</i> ’	359
5.11 The Essence	360
5.12 ‘Brahmarpanam’	360
5.13 Summary.....	360
6. Jīvanamukti	361
6.1 Experience of <i>Jīvanamukti</i>	368
6.2 Is <i>Jīvanamukti</i> Possible While living?	374
6.3 Why Does the <i>Jīvanmukta</i> Live on Earth?	378
7.1 <i>Arcirādi Mārga</i> : The Way to the Abode of Parabrahman	383
7.2 Is Oneness With Parabrahman Possible?	386
7.3 The Body of a <i>Mukta</i> in Akṣaradhāma	389
7.4 <i>Upasya-Upasaka</i> Relationship.....	399
7.5 The Role of <i>Muktas</i> in Akṣaradhāma	404
8. Some Clarity Regarding <i>Mukti</i>	407
8.1 Two Kinds of <i>Mukti</i>	407
8.2 Is <i>Jīvanamukti</i> The First Step for <i>Videhamukti</i> ?	407
8.3 The Place Where the <i>Brāhmika</i> Body is Attained	407
8.4 The Service in Akṣaradhāma.....	408
8.5 Number of <i>Muktas</i> and Their Arrangement	408
8.6 Nothing to Achieve More Than That of <i>Mukti</i>	409
8.7 Equality	410
8.8 No <i>Nitya Mukta</i>	410
8.9 No Return from <i>Akṣaradhāma</i>	410
8.11 No Deficiency in Akṣaradhāma	411

8.12 The Concept of <i>Dāsatva</i>	412
8.13 Persistence of Atomic Nature of <i>Jīva</i>	413
8.14 Attainment of Akṣaradhāma and Other Realms	413
 CHAPTER -6	416
CONCLUSION	416
1. Study of the Vedanta <i>Darśana</i>	416
2. New Era of <i>Darśana</i> Tradition	416
3. The Theme of the Thesis	417
4. The Essence of the Thesis	418
5. Analysis of Chapters	420
5.1 Chapter 1	420
5.2 Chapter - 2	422
5.2.1 Analysis on the Basis of Epistemology	422
5.3 Chapter - 3	426
5.3.1 Analysis on the Basis of Metaphysics	426
5.4 Chapter – 4	429
5.4.1 Analysis on the Basis of Spiritual Endeavour	429
5.5 Chapter – 5	432
5.5.1 Analysis on the Basis of Soteriology	432
6. Ultimate Conclusion	435
 THE PROCTOLOGICAL PROCESS [UTPATTI SARGA]	437
APPENDIX	439
GLOSSARY	445
BIBLIOGRAPHY	459

CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Vedic *Darśana* Tradition

Spirituality and philosophy are profoundly embedded within ancient Vedic texts. These well-documented, widely spread, deeply rooted, openly investigated, and soundly interpreted Vedic texts indicate the explicit way to the ultimate bliss which is attainable only by profound spirituality. However, from ancient times in India, philosophy and spirituality are interrelated. The development of Philosophy is based on spirituality itself. Without spirituality, there is no existence of philosophy in India⁴. Therefore, we use the word ‘*darśana*’ for philosophy, which is a more appropriate word that represents philosophy pervaded by spirituality.

India is a land of spiritual wisdom. A land where, from ancient times, the contemplation on the transcendent has perpetually flowed. A land where the concept of ‘one world family’ prevailed. A land of realized sages and profound philosophical thinkers who had connected the individual with the supreme entity. Here, the mysteries of life and the afterlife have been unraveled. The principle of cause and effect has been deeply pondered upon, and conclusive discussions on the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the world have transpired. This land has gifted the world with terms such as *pramāṇamīmāṃsā* (epistemology), *tattvamīmāṃsā* (metaphysics), *sādhnamīmāṃsā* (spiritual endeavor), and *muktimīmāṃsā* (soteriology). These are in fact, the subject matter of any *darśana* through which scholars analyze, discuss, and consolidate their respective positions.

⁴ Prasad Rājendra, A Conceptual-Analytic Study of Classical Indian Philosophy of Morals, New Delhi; Concept Publishing Company, 2008, p.27.

2. Darśana

The root verb of *darśana* is *drs* or ‘see’. *Darśanam* means *seeing*. In addition to that, *darśana* has a definite meaning in Hindu tradition. Seeing is an ordinary action. However, when a *ṛṣi* sees, the simple act of seeing becomes much more meaningful. In addition to seeing, he contemplates on what is seen, reflects on it from different perspectives, investigates it, and discusses it. To the great *ṛṣis*, *darśana* was not merely the act of seeing, but a sincere, mature, and diligent spiritual reflection aimed at attaining the ultimate truth. Over time, this contemplation resulted in the gradual emergence of various streams of philosophical thought within India. Within their respective times, the *maharṣis* molded these streams of thought into the form of sacred texts from which different *darśanas* emerged. Within India, there are six prominent Vedic *darśanas* collectively known as the *Shaddarśana*.⁵ These six *darśanas* are the (1) *Sāṃkhya Darśana*, (2) *Yoga Darśana*, (3) *Nyāya Darśana*, (4) *Vaiśeṣika Darśana*, (5) *Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana* and (6) *Vedānta Darśana*.⁶ Each of these six *darśanas* originated at different times and their founders were also different. In order to better understand the *Svaminārāyaṇa Darśana*, it is necessary to acquire a basic introduction of these six *darśanas*. A brief overview of each *darśana* is given below.

2.1 Sāṃkhya Darśana

The *Sāṃkhya Darśana* is one of the oldest *darśanas* in the Indian philosophical system.⁷ The sage Kapila, who is regarded as the founder of the *Sāṃkhya Darśana*, is a historical figure. This *Darśana* is one of the six *darśanas* or schools of Indian philosophy. Kapila Muni is recognized as its founder because he methodically compiled its principles in the form of *sūtras* or aphorisms. His authored text is entitled as *Sāṃkhyasūtras*. Based on the *Sāṃkhyasūtras*, Vijñānabhikṣu, a scholar

⁵ Lakhani Seeta, Ed. *Jaya Lakshmi, Hinduism for Schools*, Vivekananda Centre London Ltd 2005, pp.33-36

⁶ Bhadrēśādāsa Sādhū, *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana an Introduction*, June 2018, pub. *Svāminārāyaṇa Aksharpath*, p.5

⁷ Pāṇḍeya Dr. Mithīleśa, *Upakāra UGC NET Sansakṛta, Upakāra Prakāśana, Āgarā*, 2018, p.140

of the 16th century, composed a commentary entitled the *Sāṃkhyapravachan Bhāṣya*. Although Kapila Muni's *Sāṃkhyasūtras* is the principal text of this *Darśana*, the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*, a text written by a scholar named *Īśvarakṛṣṇa*, is more prominent. The principles of the *Sāṃkhya Darśana* are propagated through the expositions and sub-commentaries written on the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*.⁸ *Sāṃkhya* believes in twenty-five entities.⁹

मूलप्रकृतिरविकृतिर्महदाद्याः प्रकृतिविकृतयः सप्त ।

षोडशकस्तु विकारो न प्रकृतिर्न विकृतिः पुरुषः ॥ SK 3॥

“*Mūla prakṛti* is *avikārī* (changeless), other seven entities fall into *prakṛti-vikṛti*. The production of sixteen entities are called *vikāra* (changeable), while *Puruṣa* is neither *vikṛti* nor *avikārī*.” *Sāṃkhya* strongly believes in dual philosophy.¹⁰

This *darśana* places emphasis on the knowledge of the distinction between the sentient (*caitanya*) and insentient (*jaḍa*). Terms such as ‘*Prakṛti*’ and ‘*Puruṣa*’ have been utilized within this *darśana* to refer to insentient and sentient entities, The end of above-mentioned imbalance “गुणवैशम्यविमर्दात्” (SK 46), and knowing the distinction of them leads to liberation or *kaivalya*. Moreover, they assert, “ईश्वरासिद्धेः” (1/92) indicates that *Sāṃkhya* does not believe God as the final cause of the universe. *Sāṃkhya* believes in “त्रिगुणम्” (SK11) means three types of qualities. 1. *sattva* being goodness, 2. *rajas* being activity and *tamas* being the quality of darkness.

2.2 Yoga Darśana

“अथ योगानुशासनम्”(YS 1/1)

“Now, an exposition of *Yoga*.”

⁸ Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhū, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā* -1, 2007, p.157

⁹ Pāṇḍeya Dr. Mithīleśa, *Upakāra* UGC NET Sansakṛta, *Upakāra Prakāśana, Āgarā*, 2018, p.139

¹⁰ Sena Gupta, Anīmā, *The evolution of the Sāṃkhya School of Thought*, New Delhi, South Asia Books, 1986, p.23

The *Yoga* tradition is pan-universal and para-universal in its perspective.¹¹ Patañjali *Rṣi* is the founder of the *Yoga Darśana*. By composing *sūtras* that encapsulate the principles of *yoga*, he molded it into the form of a *darśana*. For this reason, this *darśana* is also known as the *Pātañjala Yoga Darśana*. The *Yogasūtras* is the principal text of this *Darśana*. Several expositions and sub-commentaries have been later authored on this aphoristic text.¹²

Yoga admits all the twenty-five entities of *Sāṃkhya* and adds *Īśvara* to it.¹³ Most of the belief systems in *Sāṃkhya* and *Yoga* remain the same. *Yoga* tells us about eight steps and *Asamprajñātā*, a deep meditation where one becomes unaware of the surroundings and remains in a trance for some period. The ultimate objective of this *darśana* is to attain *yoga*.

“योगश्चित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः”(YS 1/2)

“*Yoga*’ is defined as the absolute concentration (*nirodhā*) of the *citta*,” the inner faculty that enables one to reflect and contemplate. As a consequence of this identification, topics such as the form of the *citta*, the nature of its content, and the means to its control, have been extensively deliberated. Within this discussion, the *darśana* describes eight steps as the means to attain *yoga*. These eight steps are known as *ashtāngyoga*. They are *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyahara*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi*.¹⁴

2.3 *Nyāya Darśana*

Gautama Munī is the founder of the *Nyāya Darśana*. By creating the *Nyāyasūtras*, he established the principles of the tradition within a *dārśanic* framework. Gautama Munī was also known as Akṣapāda. Hence, this *Darśana* is also recognized as the

¹¹ Ānanda Bālayogī Bhavanānī, Understanding the *Yoga Darśana*, Dhivyānanda creations, Puduchery, 2011

¹² Zimmer Heinrich, Philosophies Of India, Brahmanism, Meridian Books New York 1957, pp.333-409

¹³ Prasāda Rāmā, Patanjali's Yogasūtras with the commentary of Vyāsa and the gloss of Vācaspati Miśrā, *Munśīrāma Manoharalāla*, p.8

¹⁴ Prasāda Rāmā, p.155.

Akshapāda Darśana. “प्रमाणैरर्थपरीक्षणं न्यायः”¹⁵ This *Darśana* defines ‘nyāya’ as the examination of objects through valid means of knowledge. *Pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāṇa* (inference), *upamāṇa* (comparison and analogy) and *śabda* (verbal testimony) are the four means to attain valid knowledge. Moreover, the School proclaims sixteen *padārthas*

“प्रमाणप्रमेयसंशयप्रयोजनदृष्टान्तसिद्धान्तावयवतर्कनिर्णयवाद-

जल्पवितण्डाहेत्वाभासच्छलजातिनिग्रहस्थानानांतत्त्वज्ञानातिःश्रेयसाधिगमः”¹⁰

“Means, right knowledge, doubt, purpose, familiar instance, established tenet, members, confutation, ascertainment, discussion, wrangling, cavil, fallacy, quibble, futility, and occasion for rebuke, by the knowledge of these substances one can attain *mokṣa*.”¹⁶

The *Nyāya Darśana* is a school of thought that emphasizes the significance of reasoning. By providing authentic reasoning and various means of knowledge, this *Darśana* offers great contributions towards re-establishing and reinforcing eternal Vedic principles. These principles include, among others, the authenticity of the Vedas, the immortality of the *ātmān*, the existence of *Paramātmān*, and reality of the world. Although the *Nyāya Darśana* does not exist today as a living tradition, its texts are still meticulously studied for their insights on skillfully establishing one’s belief through accurate reasoning and obtaining proficiency in scriptural debates.¹⁷

2.4 *Vaiśeṣika Darśana*

Vaiśeṣika is *darśana* which also believes in logically proven methods to attain valid knowledge. Kanād Munī is the founder of the *Vaiśeṣika Darśana* and the author of the *Vaisheshiksūtras*. This *Darśana* is entitled ‘*Vaiśeṣika*’ because of its belief in

¹⁵ *Nyāysūtra, Vatsyāyan Bhāṣya*, 1/1/1

¹⁶ Dr. Joshi G.N., *Atma and Moksa*, Gujarat university Ahmedabad, 1965, pp.1-27

¹⁷ *Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā-1*, 2007, pp. 182-199

the existence of an independent entity named *viśeṣa*. However, in ancient times, it was an independent *Darśana*. It had its logic, metaphysics, soteriology etc. but then the *Vaiśeṣika* system became similar to the *Nyāya* School. Still, its seven special categories are providing a unique contribution to the Indian philosophical system: “धर्मविशेषप्रसूतात्द्रव्यगुणकर्मसामान्यविशेषसमवायानां पदार्थानां साधर्म्यवैधर्म्याभ्यां तत्त्वज्ञानान्निःश्रेयसम्”। (VS 1/1/4) “Substance, quality, action, genus, difference, co-inherence, and non-existence There are seven categories, which are emerged from *dharma*. By the knowledge of these seven, liberation is possible.”

2.5 *Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana*:

Maharṣi Jaiminī is the founder of the *Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana*. ‘*Mīmāṃsā*’ is defined as deep thought or deliberation. Since reflection on karmas (*karmamimāṃsā*) must precede (is *purva* to) the reflection on Brahman (*brahmamīmāṃsā*), this *Darśana* is also identified as *Pūrvamīmāṃsā*. The *Darśana* primarily focuses on the methodical establishment of rites, such as *yajñas*, that have been advocated by the Vedas. Jaiminī was a master in Vedic methods of performing *yajñas*. He states:

चोदनालक्षणोऽर्थो धर्मः ॥ JS 1/1/2 ॥

“*Dharma* is defined as the object which is distinguished or qualified by a command,” *Śābara* explains it as rites and rituals of *yajñas* described in the Vedas. “चोदनेति क्रियायाः प्रवर्तकं वचनमाहुः”¹⁸ By composing the *Karmasūtra*, Maharṣi Jaiminī sculpted a tradition of Vedic rituals into a systematic school of thought. These *sūtras* establish uniformity among Vedic *Śrotams* that describe these rituals and ceremonies. Thereafter, a scholar named *Śābara* authored a commentary known as the *Śābara Bhāṣya* on this text. Several sub-commentaries were also subsequently written on this commentary. The texts of this *Darśana* offer comprehensive explanations on numerous topics, including the various types of *yajñas*; the objects

¹⁸ Miśrā Prabhākara, *Bṛhatī Śābarabhāṣya Vyākhyā*, p.16

used within these *yajñas*; and the form of Indra, Varuṇa, Surya, Agni, and other deities, whose favor is to be attained by these *yajñas*.¹⁹

2.6 Vedanta Darśana

The Upaniṣads are known as Vedanta. Therefore, the school of philosophy that is based on the *Upaniṣads* is the Vedanta Darśana. The essence of the *Upaniṣads* is *brahmavidyā*. For this reason, the Vedanta Darśana is identified as the school of *brahmavidyā*. In addition to the *Upaniṣads*, this *brahmavidyā* is also explained within the *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*. As a result, the Vedanta Darśana also considers the *Gītā* to be greatly significant. Maharṣi Vyāsa compiled this *brahmavidyā* in the form of *sūtras*. These *sūtras* are collectively known as the *Brahmasūtra*. The *Brahmasūtra* is also often referred to as *Brahmamimāṃsā*, because of its thorough investigation of the entity Brahman. In this manner, the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtra* form the foundational scriptures of the Vedanta Darśana. These three scriptures are collectively known as the *Prasthānatrayī*. The Vedanta Darśana is the only school of Vedic philosophy that is still actively practiced today. Within India, traditions such as *Advaita*, *Vishishtādvaita*, and *Dvaita* have emerged as branches of the Vedanta Darśana.²⁰

2.6.1 Branches of the Vedanta Darśana

Within India, several *dārṣanic* traditions have emerged as branches of the Vedanta Darśana. These traditions include the *Advaita Darśana*, *Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana*, *Dvaita Darśana*, *Dvaitādvaita Darśana*, *Śuddhādvaita Darśana*, and *Acintyabhedābheda Darśana*. A brief description of each of these six *darśanas*, along with the seventh, the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana*, is given below.

¹⁹ Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā*-1, 2007, pp.219-225

²⁰ Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Akṣara- Puruṣottama Darśana* an Introduction, 2018, pp. 8-9

2.6.1.1 *Advaitā Darśana* (Ādi Śaṃkarācārya)

The *Advaitā Darśana* was established by Ādi Śaṃkara. It is believed that he lived between 788 and 820 CE. Śaṃkarācārya authored commentaries on the *Upaniṣad*, *Bhagavad Gitā*, and *Brahmasūtra* according to the principle of *Advaitā* – non-dualism. He traveled throughout India and instituted four centers of learning (*mathas*) – one in each of the four cardinal directions.²¹ Ādi Śaṃkara mentions his entire position:

श्लोकार्धेन प्रवक्ष्यामि यदुक्तं ग्रन्थकोटिभिः। ब्रह्म सत्यं जगन्मिथ्या जीवो ब्रह्मैव नापरः॥²²

“I explain in half of the *śloka* which is described in billions of scriptures that only Brahman is the ultimate reality; this world is false and *jīva* is Brahman itself nothing else.” The *Advaitadarśana* accepts the existence of only one real ontological entity, Brahman. *Māyā* and the world that is created from it is understood to be merely an illusion and unreal. Brahman is believed to be *nirguṇa* (without qualities) and *nirākāra* (without form). Brahman itself becomes bound by this illusionary *māyā* and becomes liberated from it. It is believed that Brahman itself takes the form of the *jīvas* and the world. In order to secure the *Advaita* principle, the following three realities are conceived: the *pāramārthika* (absolute reality), *vyāvahārika* (experiential reality), and *prātibhasika* (imaginative reality).

2.6.1.2 *Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana* (Rāmānujācārya)

The founder of the *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, Rāmānuja was a prominent philosopher of his time. He was a *Vaiṣṇava* devotee born in 1017 CE in Sriperumbudur, Tamilnadu. He substantiated the doctrine of *Viśiṣṭādvaita*, or qualified non-dualism, by authoring commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gitā* and the *Brahmasūtra*. He, however, did not author a commentary on the *Upaniṣad*. Sometime later, a scholar named Rangarāmānuj composed a commentary on the *Upaniṣad* according to Rāmānujācārya’s doctrine.

²¹ Dr Prinja K. Nawal, Explaining Hindu Dharma, RMEP of Chanistor Publications Ltd. 1996, pp.126-163

²² Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhu, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Ruparekhā*-2, 2007, p.21

The *Vishishtādvaita* position advocates the existence of three ontological entities: *cit* (sentient), *acit* (insentient), and Brahman. Brahman is forever qualified, or *Viśiṣṭa*, by sentient and insentient creation. This doctrine is identified as *Viśiṣṭādvaita* as a result of this relationship. Having refuted many *Advaita* principles, including the acceptance of Brahman as the only single, real entity, the world as an illusion, the *jīva* as ontologically identical with Brahman, and Brahman as *nirguṇa*, Rāmānujāchārya established his own position in his commentarial works. Within this *Darśana*, the significance of devotion (*bhakti*) and refuge (*prapatti*) is emphasized, and Vaikuntha is regarded as the highest abode.

Rāmānuja claims:

ईश्वरश्चिदचिच्चेति पदार्थ त्रितयं हरिः।

ईश्वरश्चिदिति प्रोक्तो जीवो दृष्यमचित्पुनः॥²³

“The tenets of Rāmānuja are as follows: three categories are established, as soul, not soul, and Brahman; or as a subject, object, and supreme disposer.” His *Viśiṣṭādvaita* (qualified monism) also affirms that there is a unity of each individual self and can realize identity with the Brahman.^{24 25 26}

2.6.1.3 *Dvaita Darśana* (Madhvācārya)

Madhvācārya CE (1238-1317), or Purāṇa Prājña or Ānanda Tīrtha, was a great philosopher of India. He asserted the *Dvaita* (dualism) school of Vedānta. Madhvā identified his philosophy as ‘*Tattvavāda*’ (realist viewpoint). His *Bhedavāda* reveals:

स्वतन्त्रं परतन्त्रं द्विविधिं तत्त्वमिष्यते।

स्वतन्त्रो भगवान् विष्णुर्निर्दोषोऽशेषसद्गुणः ॥²⁷

²³ Mādhvācārya, *Sarvadarśana Sangraha*, Caukhambā Vighābhavana, Vārāṇasī, 2016, p.161

²⁴ C. J. Bartley, op.cit., pp. 1-2, 9-10, 76-79, 87-98.

²⁵ Bruce M. Sullivan, *The A to Z of Hinduism* Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, p. 239.

²⁶ Sean Doyle, *Synthesizing the Vedānta: The Theology of Pierre Johannis*, S. J. Peter Lang, 2006, pp. 59-62.

²⁷ Madhvācārya, *Sarvadarśana Sangraha*, Caukhambā Vighābhavana, Vārāṇasī, 2016, p.212.

“The two categories are asserted: one independent and second dependent. Independent is Lord Viṣṇu, who is flawless and eminent with infinitive virtues whereas the rest of the entities fall into the dependent category.”

Madhvāchārya was a devotee of Kṛṣṇa. He was born in South India and is believed to have lived between 1238 and 1317 CE. Madhvāchārya authored commentaries on the *Upaniṣads* and the *Brahmasūtra*. In order to further propagate his philosophy, he established the ‘Shri Krishna Matha’ in Udupi, a town located in the state of Karnāṭaka.

‘*Dvaita*’ means two. This *Darśana* is identified as *Dvaita* because it accepts the existence of two distinct real entities: that which is *svatantra* (independent) and those that are *paratantra* (dependent). It believes Paramātmā is independent, whereas all others - *jīva*, *prakṛti*, and the world – are dependent. In addition to the sacred texts of the *Prasthānatrayī*, this *darśana* also accepts the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Panchrātra* texts as authoritative. Bhakti is considered to be a prominent spiritual endeavor. The *Darśana* is severely critical of the *Advaita* principles.

2.6.1.4 *Dvaitādvaita Darśana* (Nimbārkaāchārya)

The *Dvaitādvaita Darśana* is also known as the *Bhedābhēddarśana*. Nimbārkaāchārya, a devout follower of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, established the *Dvaitādvaita Darśana*. He is believed to have lived during the sixteenth century. Along with other texts, he authored a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* entitled the *Vedantapārijāta-Saurabha*. Within this *darśana*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā has a specific relationship. *Bhedābhēddarśana* explicitly says,

“चिदचित्स्वाभाविकभेदाभेदाश्रयो भगवान् वासुदेवः पुरुषोत्तमः”²⁸

²⁸ Nimbārkaāchārya, *Vedantapārijāta Saurabhakhyā* three *Bhāṣya*, nityasvarupabrahmachari mudritam, Vṛndāvana. p.19

“Lord Viṣṇudeva Puruṣottama is the natural substratum as distinct and united, sentient and nonsentient entities.” Within this *Darśana*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is worshipped as the Supreme Being and Rādhā is considered to be the principal devotee. The *Darśana* accepts the existence of the following three ontological entities: *cit*, *acit*, and Brahman. By believing *cit* and *acit* to be distinct from Brahman, the position advocates a dualistic point of view. Despite this, by understanding the *cit* and *acit* to not exist independently from Brahman, the position also supports a non-dualistic perspective. That is why this *Darśana* is identified as *Dvaitādvaita Darśana*.²⁹

2.6.1.5 *Śuddha Advaita Darśana* (Vallabhācārya)

Vallabhācārya (CE 1479-1531), was the founder of *Śuddha Advaita Darśana* and *Puṣṭimārga*. He is the *ācārya* and Guru within the *Puṣṭimārga*, which he founded after his own interpretation of the Vedānta Philosophy. Similar to Śaṅkara’s position, this *Darśana* accepts the existence of a single ontological entity, Brahman. शुद्धयोः अद्वैतम् इति शुद्धाद्वैतम्। अर्थात् शुद्धजगतः जीवस्य च शुद्धब्रह्मणा अद्वैतम्। जगद्जीवौ शुद्धब्रह्मणोः स्वरूपौ किन्तु ब्रह्मणः अभिन्नौ। कारणरूपब्रह्म च कार्यरूपजीवजगदात्मकब्रह्म शुद्धं, न मायिकम्। “कार्यकारणरूपं हि शुद्धं ब्रह्म न मायिकम्”³⁰ इति।

“Two pure united entities identified as *Śuddhā Advaita*. This world has no influence of *māyā* so has *jīva*. The world and the *jīva* are the forms of Brahman itself. They are not distinct from Brahman. In this way, Brahman in the form of cause and the world and the *jīva* in the form of effect are pure without the impact of *māyā*.” However, Brahman, by its own wish, becomes the *jīvas* and the world. This is understood as *Bhagavān*’s divine play. His devotional songs on Kṛṣṇa are very famous even today. Mostly in the poetry of the sect, God’s daily actions and incidents are described. It became the tradition that no Vaishnava devotee spend

²⁹ Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhū, *op.cit.*, pp.144-145

³⁰ Girīdhara Gosvāmī, *Śuddhādvaita Mārtaṇḍa* - 28

their time without singing or memorizing these devotional songs.³¹ Vallabhā's memories are preserved at Nāthvara and in the Braja region.

2.6.1.6 *Acintyabhedābheda Darśana* (Caitanya Mahāprabhu)

Caitanya Mahāprabhu (18 February 1486–14 June 1534) established the *Achintyabhedābheda Darśana*. He was born in 1486 CE in West Bengal. Although he did not author any commentaries, a scholar within his lineage named Baldeva Vidyābhushana authored a commentary on the *Brahmasūtras* in 1875 CE. This *dārṣanic* tradition is known as *Madhva Gaudīya*, or *Gaudīya Saṁpradāya*. Within this tradition, Kṛṣṇa is identified as the supreme being and Rādhā is also revered. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Bhagavad Gītā* are considered to be primary texts for attaining devotion towards Kṛṣṇa. Paramātmā is regarded as being powerful and understood to possess infinite powers. The *darśana* believes that it is unascertainable (*achintya*) to know whether there is a distinction (*bheda*) between Paramātmā and his power or they are one (*abheda*). As a result of this position, this *Darśana* is identified as the *Achintyabhedābheda Darśana*. It says:

चैतन्यमतस्य सारांशः प्रसिद्धश्लोके प्रदत्तः। यथा
आराध्यो भगवान् ब्रजेशतनयस्तद्धाम वृन्दावनं
रम्या काचिदुपासना ब्रजवधूर्वर्गेण या कल्पिता।
शास्त्रं भागवतं प्रमाणममलं प्रेमा पुमर्थो महान्
श्रीचैतन्यमहाप्रभोर्मतमिदं तत्रादरो नः परः॥³²

“Within this tradition, Śrī Kṛṣṇā is identified as the supreme being who was a son of Nanda, the ruler of Braja. God's abode is *Vṛndāvana*. The worship method is accepted from *gopīs* who offered worship to Kṛṣṇā. Among them, Rādhā is greatly venerated. The favorite scripture is the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. They believe in loving devotion towards God. This is Caitanya Mahāprabhu's position. We don't believe in anything else.” The *Darśana* believes that it is unascertainable to know whether

³¹ Catherine B. Asher; Cynthia Talbot, *India Before Europe*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 111-112.

³² Gopālabhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, *Śrīharibhaktivilāsa* -8

there is a distinction between Paramātmān and his power or they are one. As a result of this position, this *Darśana* is identified as the *Acintyabhedābheda Darśana*. Caitanya is sometimes referred to by the names Gaurāṅga or Gaurā.

3. Vedic *Darśana* Tradition and the *Prasthānatrayī Śāstras*

3.1 What are *Śāstras*?

‘शास्ति च त्रायते च इति शास्त्रम्’ – that which rule and protect us are called scriptures.

अनेकसंशयोच्छेदि परोक्षार्थस्य दर्शकम् |

सर्वस्य लोचनं शास्त्रं यस्य नास्त्यन्ध एव सः ||

Śāstras uproot doubts and clarify principles that are difficult and subtle. *Śāstras* are the true eyes of man. Without them we are blind. In this chapter, we will acquaint ourselves with the three foremost of the many *Hindū śāstras*. Collectively known as the *prasthānatrayī*, these three *śāstras* have been stamped with philosophical treatises.

3.2 *Prasthānatrayī*

Prasthāna means a *śāstra* that establishes principles, and the suffix *trayī* denotes the quantity of three. The three *śāstras* which comprise the *prasthānatrayī* are the *Upaniṣads*, *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtras*. These *śāstras* are named *Prasthān* because it is only through them that philosophical principles are established (*Prasthāpan*). *Hindū Sanātana sampradāyas* have always established, supported, and promoted their philosophical principles using the *Prasthān Śāstras*. This unique tradition started in ancient times. *Ācāryas* such as Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānujācārya, Madhvācārya, Nimbārkācārya, Vallabhācārya, Rāmāṇaṇḍācārya and others, have written commentaries on these *śāstras*. Similarly, commentaries on these three *śāstras* have also been written in the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya*. The three *Prasthān śāstras* are set to be considered

as the supreme authority in matters of philosophical debate amongst followers of *Hindū Sanātana Dharma*.³³

3.2.1 The First *Prasthāna*: The *Upaniṣads*

The Vedas are the oldest documented manual of mankind. It constitutes a way of life that leads humans to the ultimate bliss of the supreme reality. The Vedas are classified into four parts- *Samhitā*, *Brāhmaṇa*, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣad*. The *ant* (last part) of Veda is called Vedanta. In this manner, the entire Vedanta system is based on the Upaniṣad. In this way, *Upaniṣads* are assessed as a great treasure of mankind by the great personalities of the world.³⁴ The *Upaniṣads* are based in the Vedas. They are a specific part of the Vedas. Therefore, ‘न कश्चिद् वेदकर्ता’ there is no creator of the *Upaniṣads*. Moreover, ‘अनादिनिधना दिव्या वाक्’ they are a concise collection of the profound philosophical principles of the Vedas. That is why the *Upaniṣads* are also known as Vedanta. The philosophical definition of *Upaniṣad* is as follows: ‘उपनिषद्यते प्राप्यते ज्ञायते ब्रह्मविद्या अनया इति उपनिषद्’– *Upaniṣadyate prāpyate jñāyate brahmavidyā anayā iti Upaniṣad*. ‘The source from where we can get *brahmavidyā* is *Upaniṣad*.’

Today, we find more than 108 *Upaniṣads*. But the ten principal *Upaniṣads* are ‘ईश-केन-कठ-प्रश्न-मुण्ड-माण्डुक्य-तित्तिरिः| एतरेयं च छान्दोग्यं बृहदारण्यकं दश|– *Īśa–Kena–Kaṭha–Praśna–Muṇḍa–Māṇḍukya–Tittiriḥ; Etareyaṃ ca Chāṇdogya bṛhadāraṇyakam daśa.*’ – ‘The ten *Upaniṣads* are *Īśa (Īśāvāsyā)*, *Kena*, *Kaṭha*, *Praśna*, *Muṇḍaka*, *Māṇḍukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chāṇdogya*, and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*. The essence of the *Upaniṣads* is *brahmavidyā*: “येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्” –

³³ Gupta Gopalji, *Hinduo ke Dharmagrantha*, Hindulogy Books, New Delhi, May-2008, pp.45-53

³⁴ Max Muller (1823-1900), a famous German scholar, echoed this Sentiment when he said, “If these words of Schopenhauer need any confirmation, I willingly give mine”. Svāmī Vivekāṇḍa (1863-1902) commented, “We need strength. Who will give us strength? The *Upaniṣads* are a treasury of strength. They are capable of giving strength.” Many luminaries have thus studied and experienced the *Upaniṣads* with astonishment.

“*Yenākṣaram puruṣam vedā Satyaṁ provāca tāṁ tattvato brahmavidyām*” (Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad 1/2/13). This is the definition of *brahmavidyā*. “That by which *Akṣara* and *Puruṣa* are known in their actuality is *brahmavidyā*.”

3.2.2 The Second *Prasthāna*: *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is the second *prasthāna* of Vedānta. It is encompassed within the *Mahābhārata*. Since the *Mahābhārata* is a historical text on Indian culture and tradition and the *Bhagavad Gītā* resides within it, the *Gītā* is also identified as a historical text. The *Gītā* consists of the 18 chapters that follow the 25th chapter of The *Mahābhārata*’s ‘Bhishmaparva’. The *Gītā* is comprised of 700 verses distributed over these 18 chapters (*adhyāyas*). Within the text Dhritarashtra recites one verse, Sanjaya recites 41, Arjuna 84, and Śrī Kṛṣṇa recites 574 verses.

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is in the form of a dialogue. Within the *Mahābhārata*, it is nested within two other dialogues. Vaishampāyana is its principal speaker, while Janamejaya listens to his narration. Nested within the dialogue between Vaishampāyana and Janamejaya, is a dialogue between Sanjaya and Dhritarāshtra. Further nested within Sanjaya and Dhritarāshtra’s dialogue is Sanjaya’s narration of the conversation between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna. Among these three dialogues of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Gītā* is considered to be the most significant. Since its discussions are presented in *Anuṣṭup* and other meters, the *Gītā* is also understood to be a poetical text.

The aphorism ‘इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबृंहयेत्’ “*Itihāsapurānābhyām Vedam samupabrmhayet*” means the meaning of the Vedas should be clarified and supported historical scriptures and the Purāṇas. According to this traditional principle, the purpose of the *Gītā* is to clarify and substantiate the principles established within the Vedas and *Upaniṣads*. The *brahmavidyā* narrated within the

Upaniṣad is recollected and reaffirmed within the *Gītā*. As a result, the *Gītā* is recognized as *smritiprasthana*.³⁵

The glory of the text is said as : “सर्वोपनिषदो गावो दोग्धा गोपालनन्दनः | पार्थो वत्सः सुधीर्भोक्ता दुग्धं गीतामृतं महत् ||”³⁶ – ‘*Sarvopaniṣado gāvo dogdhā Gopalānaṃdanah, Pārtho vatsaḥ sudhīrbhoktā dugdham gītāmṛtaṃ mahat* – ‘All the *Upaniṣads* are like a heavenly cow, *Kṛṣṇa* milks the cow, Arjuna is like the calf on seeing which milk flows into the udders of the cow, and the milk of that divine cow is the nectar-filled *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, the clever devotees consume that milk.’

3.2.3 The Third *Prasthāna*: The *Brahmasūtras*

अल्पाक्षरमसंदिग्धं साखद् विश्वतो मुखम् | अस्तोभमनवद्यम् च सूत्रम् सूत्रविदो विदुः ||³⁷ *Alpākṣarasamdigdhama Sāravad Viśvato Mukham; Astobhamanavadyama Ca Sūtram Sūtravido viduhu*. “That which is composed of few words, does not contain long sentences, is capable of expressing an essential message and is clear, is called *sūtra*.” The first *sūtra* of the text is “अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा”³⁸ This text elaborates on *brahmavidyā* - knowledge of the two Brahman - Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman - which is described within sacred texts, such as the *Upaniṣads* and *Gītā*. Since this text systematically establishes and substantiates *brahmavidyā* through *sūtras*, it is known as the *Brahmasūtra*.

The *Brahmasūtra* consists of four chapters. Each chapter is in turn divided into four *pādas*. Each *pāda* is further partitioned into *adhikaraṇas* or sub-sections, and finally, each *adhikaraṇa* contains one or more *sūtras*. When establishing principles within this text, the author begins by declaring the subject of discussion. He then

³⁵ Reyna Ruth, Introduction to Indian Philosophy, Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Co. Ltd Bombay-New Delhi, 1971, pp.37-45

³⁶ BG- *Gītā Māhatmaya*/6

³⁷ Goviṃdācārya, *Vaiyākaraṇa Siddhānta Kaumudī, Śrīdharmukhollasini- Hindīvyākhyāsamanvitā-4, Caukhambā Surabhārati Prakāśana*, 2016, p. xiv

³⁸ BS 1/1/1

presents possible doubts and queries regarding the subject by presenting the *pūrvapakṣa* or opposing position. Upon invalidating the *pūrvapakṣa* through resilient and reasoned arguments, the author subsequently presents the *uttarapakṣa* or the proponent's position. He then ends reasserting the concluding principle. Since the text follows a system that is primarily dependent upon reasoning, the *Brahmasūtra* is identified as the *tarkaprasthāna*.

We have thus acquired a brief overview of the *Prasthāntrayī Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtra*. These principal texts highlight *Upāsanā* – devotion to Paramātmā, and *brahmavidyā* (describes Brahman and Parabrahman which is the chief endeavor to attain the final goal).³⁹

4. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and His Tradition

In this subchapter, we will focus on Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's life, history, tradition, and contribution to society.

4.1 Life and Work of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa

During the 14th and 15th centuries, India began to witness a revival of the *Sanātana Dharma* (*adhyātma*) with the emergence of mystics and saint-poets. Despite centuries of oppression by Muslim rulers, these mystics successfully awakened the eternal *Hindū* spirituality in the people. Among the many saints, Tulasīdāsa, Sūradāsa, Tukārāma, Guru Nānaka and some of the later Sikha Gurus, Rohidāsa, Kabir, Mīrābāī, Narasiṃha Mehta, Jñāneśvara, Ekanātha, and Nāmadeva contributed significantly to this revival. Svāmī Rāmadāsa inspired the renowned Śivājī of Mahārāṣṭra, who then rose against the Mughals for oppressing *Hindūs*. In 1707, when Aurangzeb, the tyrant of Delhi, died, *Mughal* dominance ended.⁴⁰

³⁹ Kulkarni Chidambara, Vedic Foundations of Indian Culture, The Rsi and The Veda, Shri Dvaipayana Trust Bombay-Dharwar-Banglore, 1973, p.12

⁴⁰ Jñānānandadāsa Sādhu, *Vacanāmṛtanī Viśeṣatāom*, Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapīṭha, Jul. 2019, p.4

The Rājaputa Mahārājās of Jayapura, Jodhpura, and Udaipura regained their independence and this boosted the *Hindū Dharma*. Crowning this renaissance, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa incarnated in Chapiyā near Ayodhyā, on *Caitra Suda* 9, *Samvata* 1837 (3rd April 1781 CE). His childhood name was Ghanaśyāma.⁴¹

Besides playing with friends during childhood, Ghanaśyāma also loved to visit *mandiras*, where He often devotedly listened to the Rāmāyaṇa. His divine disposition was evident from early childhood. Everybody in the region felt radiant divinity and a remarkable Godly personality in Ghanaśyāma. Being precocious, He mastered Sanskrit and studied the Vedic *Śāstras* by the age of eleven. Around this period, He accompanied His father, a Sanskrit *Paṇḍita*, to Banārasi, the most sumptuous seat of knowledge in India. Here, Ghanaśyāma gave a brilliant exposition on the *Svāminārāyaṇa* philosophy on behalf of His father, in a scholarly debate with other *Paṇḍitas*.⁴² Soon after returning, Ghanaśyāma left home, to begin the task for which He had incarnated. Now known as Nīlakaṇṭha, He visited the important sacred shrines of India, to re-infuse sacredness in them, to personally observe the level of spiritual values and beliefs, and to redeem countless souls. His garb consisted of only a loincloth. He carried a Śāligrāma (Bāla Mukunda), a water gourd, and a small diary written by Him containing the essence of scriptural wisdom. He possessed no map or compass to guide Him. He subsisted on alms or fruit lying on the forest floor.⁴³

In the bleak and desolate areas of the *Himālayan* ranges, He went without food and sometimes water for days. His longest span without a single morsel of food was during His visit to the earth's most sacred and enchanting lake, *Mānasarovara*.⁴⁴ It is located at the height of 14,950 feet in Tibet, now inside China's border. He took

⁴¹ Dave Haṣadarāya, Bhagvan Svāmīnārāyan-1, *Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2004, p.22

⁴² *Ibid*, p.80

⁴³ Rama Murthy Vārāṇasī and Sādhu Vivekajīvanadāsa, Nīlakaṇṭha Varṇī, *Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2005, p.1

⁴⁴ *Ibid*., p.42

His last meal in the shrine at *Badrīnātha* after celebrating *Divālī* in October 1792. He had His second meal, on returning to the shrine from *Mānasarovara* in the spring of 1793 CE, six months later. Added to this divine feat, He visited the lake during the winter, gladly tolerating snowstorms and sub-zero winds. He also bathed in the freezing water after breaking the surface of the (in all probability) frozen lake. Later in *Muktinātha*,⁴⁵ He performed severe austerities for about two and a half months, living only on fruits, leaves, and water. Extremely emaciated, He possessed the combined luster of an adept *Yogī* and a *Brahmacārī*. In Bhuṭola, Nepāla, King Mahādattā Sen was so captivated with Nīlakaṇṭha and His profound wisdom, that he offered Him his kingdom and two daughters in marriage.⁴⁶ Nīlakaṇṭha declined politely and left. His lifework lay in uplifting those submerged in it by remaining aloof from the material and sensual world.

In the Himalayan forests, Nīlakaṇṭha met Gopāla Yogī, from whom He mastered *Aṣṭāṅga-yoga* in a record nine months.⁴⁷ It would generally have taken a yogi a lifetime of relentless endeavor. After visiting Kāṭhamaṇḍū, He turned south-east to Bangāla and trudged through the tiger-infested forests of the Suṃdarabana. From Bangāla, His route led southwards to Kanyākumārī on the southern coast of India. During His travels, He encountered Sādhus and heads of various schools of philosophy. From them, He sought details regarding the nature of the five eternal realities, namely; *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, *Brahman* and *Parabrahman*. So far, the answers disappointed Him.⁴⁸

4.2 In Gujarat

Trudging northwards, He arrived in Saurāṣṭra, Gujarat, on *Śrāvaṇa vād* 6, *Samvata* 1856 (21.8.1799 CE), after seven years and over 12,000 km of arduous traveling.

⁴⁵ Rama Murthy and Sādhu Vivekajīvanadāsa, Nīlakaṇṭha Varnī, *Svāmīnarayan Akṣarapiṭha*, 2005, p.61

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.77

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.83

⁴⁸ Dave Haṣadarāya, *Ibid.*, p.235

In the village Loja, He finally received a satisfactory explanation about the five realities, from a humble *sādhū* named Mukṭānanda Svāmī. He was the acting head of an *ashram* (monastery) belonging to Svāmī Rāmānanda, a notable religious leader in Saurāṣṭra.⁴⁹ Nīlakaṇṭha's heart finally warmed on observing the purity and the strict disciplinary codes of *brahmacārī* of the *sādhū*s. Joining this *sādhū* order, He served humbly by washing clothes, utensils, collecting cow dung for fuel, and begging alms. He also taught *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* to the *sādhū*s including Mukṭānanda. The young *Brahmacārī*'s divinity affected them profoundly.

Nine months later, Rāmānanda Svāmī arrived from his touring. To his followers, he had long proclaimed himself as a drumbeater in a play, heralding the chief player's arrival. That player had arrived in the form of Nīlakaṇṭha. Rāmānanda Svāmī initiated Nīlakaṇṭha, renaming Him Sahajānanda Svāmī and Nārāyaṇa Muni. One year later, in 1802 CE, Rāmānanda Svāmī, ceremoniously appointed twenty-one-year-old Sahajānanda Svāmī as the Head of the Fellowship.⁵⁰

4.3 Unique Prayer

Svāmī then prayed to Rāmānanda Svāmī for two unique boons, which remain unequaled in the history of the Guru-disciple relationship: “If your disciple is destined to suffer the distress inflicted by the sting of one scorpion, may the distress of millions and millions of scorpion stings befall each and every pore of my body; but no pain should afflict your disciple, may that begging bowl come to Me; but on no account should your disciple suffer for want of food or clothing.” Rāmānanda Svāmī granted the two boons.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.312

⁵⁰ Dave Haṣṭadarāya, Bhagvan Svāmīnārāyan-1, *op.cit.*, pp. 376-377.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.378.

Sahajānanda Svāmī then gave the followers the *Svāminārāyaṇa* mantra to chant.⁵² Henceforth, He became known as Svāminārāyaṇa. The devotees and *sādhus* lovingly addressed Him as Śrījī Mahārāja or Mahārāja. As soon as people chanted this *mantra*, they attained a trance-like state called *samādhī*, usually only possible after mastering the eight steps of *aṣṭāṅga-yoga*. However, here, by Śrījī Mahārāja's grace, people had a vision of their personal deities or incarnations. Countless were thus attracted to the fold.⁵³ Initially, Śrījī Mahārāja established alms-houses for the needy. His *Paramahaṃsa* dug wells and ponds in many towns and villages where there was a constant shortage of water. He knew that only if the fundamental needs of the people for food and water were met would they begin to think of higher ideals of morality, character, and devotion to God. He also persuaded them to forsake *adharma*, such as female infanticide and *sati*.⁵⁴

4.4 Purity in Festival

The degradation of sacred festivals was another form of *adharma* prevailing in contemporary society. Under the guise of propitiating deities, the custodians of *dharma* – the *sādhus* and Brahmins misled society. They had introduced false modes of devotion in the form of immoral and evil rituals, such as adultery and the partaking of meat and liquor as *prasāda* – sanctified offerings. Gambling and licentious behavior also prevailed during festivals. In reality, the festivals became a ruse for the gratification of the senses. Therefore, Śrījī Mahārāja decided to hold prominent holy festivals by inviting devotees in mass gatherings. In these, He elucidated the import of the festivals and the specific rituals and rites to be performed. For instance, He was the first to advocate *Ahiṃsaka Yajñas* – a non-violent ritual of the sacred fire – to prevent the slaughter of animals such as goats.⁵⁵

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.387

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 400-410

⁵⁴ Ādarśajīvanadāsa Sādhu, Bhagwan Śrī Svāmīnarayan *Jīvana ane Karya*, *Svāmīnarayan Akṣarapīṭha*, 2014, p.68

⁵⁵ Vāghelā B. G., Bhagvan Svāmīnarayannu *Samakālīna Lokajīvana*, *Svāmīnarayan Akṣarapīṭha*, 2011, p. 155

Another example of His edification of festivals was removing vice such gambling from *Kṛṣṇa Janmāṣṭamī*, the birthday celebration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Śrījī Mahārāja advocated reading of the *śāstras*, singing devotional *kīrtanas* extolling the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and fasting to uplift the senses onto a more sublime plane. He formulated a similar solution to abolish ribald songs, known as *phaṭānā*, sung during marriage ceremonies. He replaced these songs with *kīrtanas* glorifying the marriage of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī, composed by His *sādhus*. Through His sublime love and teachings, He also convinced the local pugnacious clans to renounce their lawless ways of living and turn to trade or agriculture instead. In A Comprehensive History of India, Datta notes, “They gave up the habit of drinking, gambling, eating meat, smoking and raised their moral standards. Sahajānandaji exhorted people to have restraint on their passions and lead a pure – God-fearing life. ... Some criminal tribes even gave good citizens.”⁵⁶ Bishop Heber too noted the lofty level of morality established by Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa, “His morality was said to be far better than any which could be learned from the *śāstras*.”⁵⁷

4.5 Women’s Upliftment

For the female devotees, He took a bold and revolutionary step. He introduced special arrangements for them to sit and worship in *Mandiras* on an equal footing with men and appointed women well-versed in the Satsang literature to teach female devotees. Hitherto, women had been neglected by society. Hence, they could neither obtain formal education nor religious instruction. In fact, in the recent history of Indian culture, He was the first to liberate women in the real sense the world knows today. Through his grace, many female devotees attained an exalted spiritual state.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Datta K K and Nārāyaṇa V A, A Comprehensive History of India-11, People’s publishing house, 2000, p.848

⁵⁷ Heber Reginald, Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India-2, John Murray Albemarle Street, 1846, p. 106.

⁵⁸ Ādarśajīvanadāsa Sādhū, Bhagwan Śrī Svāmīnārāyan *Jīvana ane Karya*, Svāmīnārāyan Akṣarapiṭha, 2014, p.73

4.6 *Sādhus* of Svāminārāyaṇa

He created a unique order of three thousand ascetics to aid Him to establish *Ekāntika Dharma*. The majority of these ascetics were known as *Paramahaṃsas*. For all the ascetics, He advocated five vows: eight-fold *Brahmacārya* (*niṣkāma*), non-attachment (*nissneha*), non-ego (*nirmāna*), non-taste (*nisvāda*) and non-avariciousness (*nirlobha*). They lived frugally by begging alms, walked barefoot, and continually traveled throughout the land to uplift people. The *Paramahaṃsa* lived a very pure and pious life. By observing their life, people began to disregard the false ascetics, who therefore mercilessly persecuted and inhumanly beat the *Svāminārāyaṇa* ascetics. Nevertheless, the *Paramahaṃsa*' 'romance of discipleship', as Pārekha observed in Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa,⁵⁹ blossomed to ever greater loftiness. On one occasion, a group of envious people, resenting a *sādhu*'s chanting of the *Svāminārāyaṇa mantra*, impaled and burned him with red hot pincers which left pieces of burnt flesh hanging grotesquely from his body. The half-dead *sādhu* remained dauntless and, after recovering, resumed his touring. Śrījī Mahārāja Himself was persecuted on several occasions.⁶⁰

The *Paramahaṃsas* traveled throughout Gujarat and emphasized devotion to one God; then manifesting as Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa They enlightened ignorant peasants about the all-doer ship of God and thus freed them from the fear of superstitious elements, witchcraft, and sorcery. Śrījī Mahārāja's fundamental teaching was based on living a life of the character as upheld by *dharma*; defined by Him as *sadācāra* – righteous living. By such living, even a notorious looter like Jobana Pagī of Vartāla, and Nāthibhāī of Jetalpur– the prostitute– renounced their sinful existence and became ideal devotees. As Pryns Hopkins noted in the *Psychology and the Social Worker*,⁶¹ "Yet, his message had a revolutionary effect

⁵⁹ Pārekha Maṇilāla, Śrī Svāmīnārāyaṇa, *Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavana*, Bombay, 1980 p.132.

⁶⁰ Ādarśajīvanadāsa Sādhu, *Ibid*, p.104

⁶¹ Hopkins Pryns, *Character and Personality Journal*, Volume:3, Issue:1, 1939, p.77

on the personal lives and character of thousands of people in a very lawless period. Members of martial tribes gave up meat and drink, they renounced the use of opium and tobacco, to both of which most of them were very much addicted.”

4.7 Savior of Gujarat

While Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa was successfully reviving *Dharma* by His divinity, missionaries vied with each other in India, “hoping to bring Christian salvation to millions of “heathen” “souls.”⁶² Abbé Dubois, a French missionary, managed to convert a mere 200 to 300 beggars between 1792 and 1823. He then left for Paris disillusioned. In the early 17th century, American missionaries targeted India as the first foreign destination. In 1801, a museum in Salem jubilantly displayed a *shikha* shaved off a Brahmin on being converted. In 1812, American missionaries in *Bombe* read the scripture in Gujarati to native children. “But they never have yet made a convert,”⁶³ observed William Rogers, a trader from Boston. Hence conversion in India was regarded as a great challenge. In 1822, Bishop Middleton of Calcutta died. This put the Church of England in a dilemma. However, C. W. Williams Wynn, the chairman of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, had his eyes on a long acquaintance – a promising young priest named Reginald Heber. Heber, too had dreamt of working in India. Therefore, Wynn sent him a letter of appointment. Meanwhile, he has conferred Lord Bishop of Calcutta on 1st June 1823 at Lambeth Palace Church. On 16th June 1823, he left England for India.

In Baroda, Heber heard much about Svāminārāyaṇa’s success from the Company’s officers. This induced in him an eagerness to meet Him, with the intention of “inducing him to go with me to *Bombe*, where I hoped that by conciliatory

⁶² Bean, S.S. Yanki India- American Commercial and Cultural Encounters With India in The Age of Sail 1754-1860, *Salema Mepina*, 2001, p. 130.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 133

treatment, and the conversations to which I might introduce him with the Church Missionary Society... I might do him better than I could otherwise hope to do.”⁶⁴ However, after meeting Him on 26th March 1825, his high aspirations crumbled; “I thought from all which I saw that it would be to no advantage to ask him to accompany me to *Bombe*.” Though unable to influence Svāminārāyaṇa, he was nonetheless highly impressed by His success; a success which he could not hope to match:“.... but it was also apparent that he had obtained a great power over a wild people, which he used at present to a good purpose.”⁶⁵ Heber then left Gujarat for good. Thus, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa’s presence saved Gujarat from the seeds of proselytization. His divine fragrance embellished *Sanātana Dharma* and solidified its foundation. For this purpose, He remains manifest eternally earth through such *Satpuruṣa’s* – His *Guṇātīta Sādhus*. The first was Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmī and the sixth today is HDH Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja.

4.8 Philosophy

Svāminārāyaṇa effectively assailed the roots of the immoral and lawless in society by eradicating the base instincts of ego, lust, greed, hate, and anger from their hearts. He gave them a new direction; devotion to God. He thus showed that a *jīva* (the self) could be freed of sin, attain *mokṣa*, and experience God’s bliss in this very birth. is basic philosophy stresses that the *ātmān* (pure soul) is separate from the three bodies – the gross, the subtle, and the causal and above the three *guṇas*, namely *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The *ātmān* identifies itself with Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) and offers a devotion to *Parabrahman*, the Supreme Reality. This is mediated by the manifest form of Akṣarabrahman – the *Guṇātīta Sādhu*.

⁶⁴ Heber Reginald, Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India -3, John Murray Albemarle Street, London, 1846, p.37.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.42.

Towards the final years of Svāminārāyaṇa's life, He consolidated and strengthened the framework of the *saṃpradāya* by erecting six *mandiras* of the breathtaking beauty. In these, He consecrated the *mūrtis* of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Nara and Nārāyaṇa, Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa and others, in consonance with *Sanātana Dharma*'s eternal tradition of worshipping God with His foremost *bhakta* (devotee). In addition to *mandira* construction, the *saṃpradāya* needed a code of conduct and a foundation of philosophical literature. An erudite scholar of the *śāstras* Himself, He arranged philosophical sessions every day in which He enriched His philosophy. Five of His senior *Paramahaṃsa* meticulously recorded and compiled His philosophical teachings, which became recognized as the *Vacanāmṛta* (the prominent subject of this thesis). He enjoined devotees to read this every day and imbibe its precepts.

4.8.1 An Introduction to the *Vacanāmṛta*

The *Vacanāmṛta* is a collection of 273 discourses. It was delivered by Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa during the last 10 years of his life, between 1819-1829 CE. Gopālānanda Svāmī, Mukṭānanda Svāmī, Nityānanda Svāmī, Śukānanda Svāmī, and Brahmanand Svāmī were the editors of the *Vacanāmṛta*. This text is the most prominent and foundational scripture of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya*. The scripture is divided into 10 sections, based on the various villages in which discourses were delivered. The sections are chronological in order and are named as follows: Gaḍhaḍā I, Sāraṃgapura, Kariyānī, Loyā, Paṃcālā, Gaḍhaḍā II, Vartāla, Gaḍhaḍā III and finally additional *Vacanāmṛtas*. Within each section, individual *Vacanāmṛtas* are arranged in chronological order and are numbered sequentially.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Dave Harshad, *New Dimensions in Vedanta Philosophy, Philosophy of Shri Svāminārāyaṇa and The Upaniṣads*, Shri Svāminārāyaṇa Mudran Mandir, 1981, p.5

4.8.2 A Historical Document

Each *Vacanāmṛta* begins with an introductory paragraph taking the reader back in time to the exact environment in which the discourses were held. This description mentally prepares the reader for the profound wisdom that is to come. The first *Vacanāmṛta* starts from 21 November to 25 July 1829. The compilers meticulously – and ingeniously – detailed all of the significant aspects of the settings of the assembly, even at the risk of sounding repetitive. Invariably, they mention the date, month, year, village, location within the village, as well as audience seated in the assembly. In many instances, they even mention the time of day and the direction in which Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa was seated. In many instances, they have even described the seat upon which he was seated as well as the dress and adornment of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa at the time. Primarily, the reason for their meticulousness was that they were convinced of his divinity.

They understood that the assembly was not an ordinary, worldly assembly of people but a divine assembly presided over by the supreme God himself. After all, much more than anything else, divinity is worthy of being recalled correctly. From a scholarly point of view, this introductory paragraph adds a stamp of authenticity to the scripture. In the words of an eminent Gujarati scholar, Mr. Bhogīlāla Sāṃdesarā: “Among all these scriptures [the scriptures of Buddhism, Jainism, Rāmānujācārya, Vallabhācārya, and other Ācāryas] the position of the *Vacanāmṛta* is unique because the discourses of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa were compiled verbatim. There is a reference to the place and time of the discourses; a note of the year, month and day; a description of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa’s garments and even the names of the people participating in the dialogues are maintained... Thus, there is no room for interpolation.” The *Vacanāmṛta* is also an authoritative scripture in as much as it was spoken by God Himself and written down at the same time. In fact, it was even reviewed and approved by Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa during its compilation, a fact evident in *Vacanāmṛta Loyā-7*. Moreover, the fact that concepts expounded in the

Vacanāmṛta are based on Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's own personal experience gives it an added note of authority. In fact, He states in *Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā* 3/39: "I deliver these discourses to you, not from an image of my mind nor to display any sort of aptitude. I have experienced all that I have spoken about. Whatever I speak, I practice first."

4.8.4 Method of Discussion

If the introductory paragraph of the *Vacanāmṛta* renders the scripture unique, the method of imparting spiritual wisdom is no less unique. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa delivered his discourses in a dialogue form. We find the root of this method in the *Upaniṣads*. At times, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa would ask a question to the members of the assembly, or sometimes he would inspire the assembly to pose a question to him. On other occasions, devotees of the assembly would ask a question directly. In his assemblies, all could question and even counter-question, regardless of whether they were scholarly renunciants or ordinary householders. Keeping in mind this question-answer method and the fact that many of the members of the assemblies were great scholars themselves, one can imagine the thoroughness of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's knowledge on subjects discussed.

4.8.5 Preaching Through a Profound Experience

The *Vacanāmṛta* entails the essence of all of the ancient scriptures. Why? Besides the fact that the supreme Reality Himself spoke the words, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa had studied the scriptures thoroughly, had mastered *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* and had also scrutinized the beliefs and practices of people throughout India. Thus, when he spoke, it was from a base of profound scriptural wisdom, advanced spiritual insight, and vast practical experience. In the *Vacanāmṛta*, He has quoted verses from the Vedas, the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* and other *Purāṇas*, the *Upaniṣads*, the *Gītā* as well as other parts of the *Mahābhārata*. In fact, in *Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā* II-28 Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa has gone so far as to say: "Whatever I speak having

heard and having extracted the essence from the Vedas, the śāstra, the Purāṇas and all other words on this earth about liberation. This is the most profound and fundamental principle; it is the essence of all essence.” Moreover, the *Vacanāmṛta* is also the first literary work of prose in the Gujarati Language, thus providing a good specimen of the culture and speaking style of the Gujarati language. It is a generous gift of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa to Gujarati literature. Having read the above, one can better grasp why the compilers named it the *Vacanāmṛta*. After all, it is, nectar, ‘amṛta’ in the form of words, ‘Vacana’ from Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa.

5. Guruparampara in Svāminārāyaṇa Faith: A Live Philosophy

5.1 Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja

Birth: *Āso Suda Pūnama*, *Samvata* 1841 (28/9/1785 CE)

Place: Bhādarā, near the port of Joḍiyā, Saurāṣṭra

Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja was the first spiritual successor of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa. Guṇātītānanda Svāmī Mahārāja was born on 28 September 1784 CE (*Āso sud 15*, *Samvat* 1841), the auspicious day of *Sharad Purnimā*, in the village of Bhādrā, Gujarat. He was named Mūlajī Śarmā. His mother's name was Sākarbā and his father's name was Bholānātha. Shrihari Sahajānanda (Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa) performed a grand *yagna* in Dabhana on 20 January 1810 CE (*Posh sud 15*, *Samvat* 1866) and initiated Mūlajī Śarmā as a sādhu, naming him Guṇātītānanda Svāmī.

A distinctive characteristic of the *Akṣarapurūṣottama Darśana* is that its two principal entities – Akṣara and Purushottam - incarnate in this world with human-like forms. The terms ‘Svāmī’ and ‘Nārāyaṇa’ found within the Svāminārāyaṇa mantra refer to Akṣarabrahman and Purushottam, respectively. Guṇātītānanda Svāmī is Akṣarabrahman. These are the identities of the incarnate forms of Svāmī and Nārāyaṇa, otherwise identified as Akṣara and Puruṣottama, according to the

teachings of Parabrahman Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus.

5.2 Bhagatjī Mahārāja

Birth: *Phāgaṇa Suda Pūnama, Saṃvata 1885 (20/3/1829 CE)*

Place: Mahuvā, Saurāṣṭra

Brahmasvarūpa Bhagatjī Mahārāja was the second spiritual successor of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa. (*Phāgaṇ sud 15, Samvat 1885*) in the village Mahuvā to a modest tailor family. He was named Prāgjī Bhakta and later became known as Bhagatjī. His father was Govindbhai and his mother was Mālubā. Bhagatjī realized by the discourses of Guṇātītānanda Svāmī that scriptures such as the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gitā*, *Brahmasūtra*, and the *Vacanāmruta* contain descriptions of Akṣara and Puruṣottama as distinct forms. Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa identified these distinct forms by revealing Guṇātītānanda Svāmī as Akṣara and himself as Puruṣottama. Thereafter, Bhagatjī Mahārāja made tremendous efforts to propagate this principle. His enthusiasm remained uninhibited when spreading Svāminārāyaṇa Bhagwan's words: “This Guṇātītānanda Svāmī is Akṣara” within the Satsang. Just before leaving for *Akṣaradhāma*, on *Kārtika Suda 13, Saṃvata 1854 (7/11/1897 CE)*, Bhagatjī told the other *gṛhastha* devotees present, “Take me to Vartāla.” This was an indirect reference of his oneness with Śāstrījī Mahārāja who then resided in the Vartāla Mandira.

5.3 Śāstrījī Mahārāja

Birth: *Mahā Suda 5 (Vasanta Pancamī Saṃvata 1921 (31/1/1865))*

Place: Mahelāva, Gujarat

Brahmasvarūpa Śāstrījī Mahārāja was the third spiritual successor of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa. He was born on 31 January 1865 CE (*Mahā sud 5, Vasant Panchmi, Samvat 1921*) to a *pātidar* family in the village of Mahelav, Gujarat. He was known as Dungara Bhakta. His father was Dhoribhai and his mother was

Hetbā. In *Chaitra, Samvat* 1922, Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmī sanctified their home in Mahelav and blessed the newborn child. On *Kārtika vad 5, Samvat* 1939, Dungar Bhakta was initiated as a *sādhu* and named Svāmī Yagnapurushdasji. Devotees often referred to him as Śāstrījī Mahārāja, due to his immense scholarly proficiency in sacred texts. He named and vindicated the doctrine of *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* by constructing magnificent temples.

5.4 Yogījī Mahārāja

Birth: *Vaiśākha Vada* 12, *Samvata* 1948 (23/5/1892)

Place: Dhārī, Saurāṣṭra

Brahmasvarūpa Yogījī Mahārāja was Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's fourth spiritual successor. He was born on 23 May 1892 CE (*Vaishākh vad 12, Samvat* 1948) in Dhārī, a village in Gujarat. He deeply instilled the principles of the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* within the hearts of modern youths. Through his efforts and travels to Africa and England, Yogījī Mahārāja brought the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* across the seas to foreign countries. In order to strengthen conviction in the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*, he established regular weekly spiritual assemblies. To this day, these assemblies serve as a forum for devotees to worship together and listen to spiritual discourses on the principles of the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*.

5.5 Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja

Birth: *Māgshara Suda* 8, *Samvata* 1977 (7/12/1921 CE)

Place: Cānsada, Gujarat

Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja is Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's fifth spiritual successor. He was born in the village Cānsada (Chansad) on 7 December 1921 CE (*Māgshar sud 8, Samvat* 1978) and later initiated as a *sādhu* by Śāstrījī Mahārāja. On 21 May 1950 CE (*Jeth sud 4, Samvat* 2006), Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja was appointed as the president of the Bochasanwasi Shri

Akṣarapuruṣottama Svāminārāyaṇa Sansthā. He has a world record of building 1000 mandirs of *Akṣarapuruṣottama* around the world. In his deaddiction camp, more than 5000000 people renounced their addiction. He had initiated 1000 youths into the *sādhu* fold to serve society.

5.6 Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja

Birth: *Bhādarvā Vada 9, Saṃvata 1989 (13/9/1933)*

Place: Jabalapura, Madhya Pradeśa

Brahmasvarūpa Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja is the sixth spiritual successor in the *AksharBrahmasvarūpa* Guru succession. He was born on 13 September 1933 CE (*Bhādhavā vad 9, Samvat 1989*) in Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh, and was later initiated as a sadhu by Brahmasvarūpa Yogījī Mahārāja. After Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja's worldly departure, Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja serves as the present Guru and continues to protect, preserve and promote the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana*. Through his untiring efforts, the *Akṣarapuruṣottama Darśana* is spread in the Gulf countries. Very calm and with immense saintly virtues are his foundational qualities. He is one of the most influential persons in the modern world.

6. Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya

6.1 The Bhāṣya Tradition

The *Bhāṣya* or commentarial tradition has its origins in ancient India. Commentaries on the Vedas and their ancillary texts by Uvvaṭa, Mahīdhara, Sāyaṇa, and Skandasvāmī amongst others; elucidations on Sanskrit grammar by Pāṇini and others; commentaries on historical texts such as the *Rāmāyana*; expositions on the *Purāṇa* texts such as the *Bhāgavata*; commentaries on the aphoristic treaties of the six schools of thought including *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, and Vedānta are all well known. Amongst these, especially in the

branches of Vedanta, novel philosophical conceptualizations continually transpire. In the past, eminent *ācāryas* such as Sankara, Rāmānuja, Madhva, and Vallabha have put forth immense effort to establish *Advaitā*, *viśistādvaita*, *dvaita*, and *suddhādvaita*, respectively. They have done this by composing commentarial texts based on the *Prasthānatrayī*; the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtra*, according to their own teachings and corresponding schools of thought. The continual composition of these texts is a true testimony to the developed thinking and cognitive independence that has always been present in India.

6.2 An Innovative Commentary of the 21st Century

The significance of the legacy of deep, reflective thought of India's Vedic *Sanātana Dharma* is that although the commentarial tradition is classical, it still adorns society with its impressive and imaginative discoveries. Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa's complete commentary on the *Prasthānatrayī*, entitled the *Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣya*, is exemplary of this continued tradition.

6.2.1 Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa (the Commentator or *Bhashyakara*)

Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa is a renowned Sanskrit pundit and scholar born on December 12, 1966, in Mahārāṣṭra, India. He is a disciple of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa. In 1981 he renounced the world and took *samyāsa dikṣā* from his spiritual Guru Pramukh Svāmī Mahārāja. He got several degrees in *Sāmkhya*, *Yoga*, *Vedanta*, *Nyāya*, *Vaiśeṣika*, and *Pūrvamīmāṃsā darśana*. He was awarded his Ph.D. for his work on *Paramātmapratiyaṅgasvarūpayogaḥ*. Thereafter, he was awarded a D.Litt. from KavikulaGuru Kālidāsa Sanskrit University (KKSU), Nāgapura. He got the *Mahāmahopādhyāya* award in 2012 and the *Darśanakesari* award in October 2013 from the *Akhila Bhāratīya Vidvata Pariṣad* for the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇabhāṣyam*.

He was a member of the project committee of the *Maharṣi Sandīpanī Rāṣṭrīya Veda Vidyā Pratiṣṭhāna*, Ujjaina. He is also a leading member of the managing committee and head of research of the BAPS *Svāminārāyaṇa* Research Institute - *Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣaradhāma*, New Delhi and a professor at both AARSH (*Akṣaradhāma* Center for Applied Research in Social Harmony) and the BAPS *Svāminārāyaṇa* Sanskrit *Mahavidyalaya* in association with Somanātha Sanskrit University, Verāvala, Gujarat. His current projects include conducting a survey of the present research activities regarding Sanskrit throughout the world. He has visited over 81 universities in 18 countries, including the United States, Canada, and many of those in Europe, and engaged in a conversation regarding current research in Sanskrit linguistics and history, Indian philosophy and epistemology, Vedic literature, the *Prasthānatrayī*, comparative studies of religion, and the philosophy of religion. He is also presently authoring another doctoral thesis under the title of “A Philosophical Analysis of ‘Akṣara’ and ‘Brahman’ in the context of Atharva *Veda* Literature” from the *Śrī Candrasekharendra Sarasvatī Viśva Mahāvidyālaya*, Kāncīpurama. In addition to his role as a senior and international lecturer on the *Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana* at BAPS' centers throughout the world, he regularly contributes both as an essayist in the monthly magazine “*Svāminārāyaṇa Prakāśa*” and as a *Paṇḍita* on the *Akṣarabrahma- Parabrahman-Darśanam* at international conferences.

6.2.2 The *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa - Bhāṣya*

The *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣya* is a commentary that thoroughly explains the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana* on the basis of the *Prasthānatrayī*, authored by Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa. Although Parabrahmannn Svāminārāyaṇa did not author commentary himself, he often referenced the teaching of Vedic sacred texts, such as the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, within his discourse. At many times he presented unprecedented explanations of these references. From this, it is apparent that the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama* doctrine is unique. Within his teaching,

Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa repeatedly revealed original principles, such as becoming *Akṣararūpa* and offering *Upāsanā* to Puruṣottama and the eternal distinction of the five ontological entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. As a result, a need arose to create commentaries on the *Prasthānatrayī* that substantiated these principles. Aware of this need, Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja (the fifth spiritual successor of SvāmīNārāyaṇa) inspired the creation of commentary on the entire *Prasthānatrayī* that correlates the Akṣara-Puruṣottama doctrine revealed by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa with scriptural revelation. Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja inaugurated this commentary (first volume) in Ahamadābāda on the morning of 17 December 2007, during the BAPS *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṁsthā*'s centennial Celebrations. In 2012, the entire commentary was accomplished.

This commentary is identified as the *Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣya*. It has been given this title because its elaboration is according to Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's revealed doctrine. This text is written entirely in Sanskrit and according to the *śāstrīya* (traditional scholarly) style. It offers a definition of each word of every *mantra* of the prominent ten *Upaniṣads*, of every *śloka* of the *Bhagavad Gītā* and of every *sūtra* of the *Brahmasūtra*. Elaborations, discussions, and argumentations on relevant topics are presented wherever necessary. The commentary also presents explanations according to the teachings of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa and the succeeding *guṇātīta* Gurus. The meanings that *Bhagavān* Svāminārāyaṇa ascribes to the terms found in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, along with their relevant contextual explanations, are scholarly established within this commentary.

6.2.3 Characteristics of the Commentary

I now wish to explore the style and other features of the commentary. The novelty of this exposition is captivating for scholars. For instance, the *Kathopaniṣad* states, “ऋतं पिबन्तौ सुकृतस्य लोके” (KU 3/1). The commentary offers an original interpretation of

this verse by explaining that the liberated self (*muktātman*) and Akṣarabrahma are those who experience happiness. The *Mundakopaniṣad* verse: “द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते” (MU 3/1/1) is also interpreted uniquely. In this verse, unlike in other commentaries, the bound self (*baddhātman*) and Akṣarabrahma are analogized (with two birds sitting on a tree). Novelty of interpretation is also found in the *Gītā-Bhāṣya*. For instance, the first verse of the second chapter presents an explanation of the three bodies. Thereafter, in “बुद्धिर्योगे त्विमां शृणु” (2/39), 'yoga' is interpreted as conviction in the form of Paramātman. “एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः” (BG 2/72) also offers a unique conceptualization of the qualitative identification with Brahman, whereas 'dharma', in “यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य” (BG 4/7) and other verses, is distinctively defined as *bhāgavatadharmā*. The divisions of the *Gītā* into two sections consisting of eight and ten *adhyāyas*, respectively, is also characteristic of the commentary (BGSB 2/28). In the twelfth chapter, while explaining the verse “क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम्” (BG 12/5), the commentator analyses '*avyaktacetasaṣṭeṣām*' as whose *cit* is not attached with Brahman.

Unique interpretations are also offered in the commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*. For instance, in the first aphorism of the *Brahmasūtras*, “ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा” ['Brahman' in "*brahmajijñāsā*"] is analyzed as *brahmaṇorjijñāsā*, i.e., dual in number. The *śruti*, “तदैक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेय” (CU 6/2/3) is found in the *skṣatyadhikaraṇam*. From "*īksateh*", the commentary infers that Paramātman has a form. The commentary elaborates, “श्रूयमाणमीक्षणं हि चेतनधर्मो जडस्य प्रधानस्य जगत्कारणत्वबोधकवाक्ये सच्छब्दवाच्यतां वारयति । न केवलं वारयत्यपि तु सच्छब्दवाच्यस्य जगत्कारणस्य दिव्यनेत्रादिकरणकलेवरात्मकं साकृतिकत्वं प्रस्थापयति” (CUSB 1/1/5).

A similar interpretation is found in the *Antastaddharmādhikaranam*. When the commentary discusses the explanation of the verse, “य एषोऽन्तरादित्ये हिरण्मयः पुरुषो दृश्यते हिरण्यश्मश्रुर्हिरण्यकेश आग्रणस्वात्सर्व एव सुवर्णः तस्य यथा कप्यासं पुण्डरीकमेवमक्षिणी” (CU 1/6/6,7), it asserts,

“इत्थमिह परमात्मैव साकृतिकत्वेन निरूपितः” (CUSB According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣyam*, the interpretation of the *Utpattayasambhavādhikaranam*'s four aphorisms: उत्पत्त्यसम्भवात्, न च कर्तुः करणम्, विज्ञानादिभावे वा तदप्रतिषेधः, विप्रतिषेधाच्च (BS 2/2/42-45) is not regarding the *Pañcarātrāgama*. Here, the commentator, unlike other *ācāryas*, indisputably dismisses *Cārvaka*'s advocated *Svabhavakaranavāda*. Those proficient in Vedānta are awestruck with the commentary's exposition of these aphorisms. It is apparent that every chapter (*adhyāya*) and every section (*pāda*) of the *Brahmasūtras*' commentary offers referenced, simple and justified interpretations that are distinct from those advocated by previous *ācāryas* such as Sankara and Rāmānuja. In this regard, the commentary can be described as being eligible and unprecedented. The commentary is also classical in style.

For instance, the commentary of the *Brahmasūtras* follows the established methodology of an *Adhikaraṇama*, which includes the presentation of the topic, putting forth doubt, the consideration of the proponent's objection, and the response. The commentary on all three texts also offers the necessary references and justifications from various texts to reinforce the interpretations it asserts. For instance, the commentary of the *Kathopaniṣad* verse, “सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति” (KU 2/15) offers relevant citations of the verses from the *Upaniṣads* of all of the Vedas. Similarly, the commentary of the aphorism “सर्ववेदान्तप्रत्ययं चोदनाद्यविशेषात्” (BS 3/3/1) also includes citations of many Vedānta verses.

The commentator's scholarly understanding and erudition of the principles of *Cārvāka*, *Buddha*, *Jain*, *Sāṃkhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyāya*, and *Vaiśeṣika* among others as presented in the second section (*pāda*) of the second chapter (*adhyāya*) of the *Brahmasūtras*' commentary is astonishing. Its method of sentence construction is also comparable to that of Śaṅkara and other classical *ācāryas*. It is also free from grammatical inconsistency, with profound meaning and depth, embellished with

well-reasoned argumentation, amiable, pleasant to hear, and untainted by enmity. Indeed, only with Paramātmā's grace and a Guru's blessings have all of these virtues come together in one place. I feel that Ācārya Bhadrēśādāsa is fortunate to have acquired their blessings. Certainly, this work attests to the future pride of Bhārata's culture.

6.2.4 *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā*

The reflection that is performed with the intent to establish doctrinal decisions is known as *vāda*. Within a *vāda* text, every principle of a *saṃpradāya* is established and substantiated by appropriate scholarly techniques and reasoning. Within such a text, questions and doubts that arise when establishing a doctrine are resolved in a scholarly manner. Consequently, a *saṃpradāya*'s *siddhānta* is protected by a *vāda* text. The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* (Parabrahman- *Svāminārāyaṇa-Prabodhitam Akṣara-Puruṣottama - Darśanam*) is a *vāda* text. Its creation was inspired by Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja and its completion was blessed by Pragaṭa Brahmasvarūpa Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja by Bhadrēśādāsa. The first edition of this text was published in June 2017. The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* is written in Sanskrit. It substantiates the *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana* as revealed by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa and propagated by the succession of *Akṣar Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus. Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja had handwritten a letter on the philosophical doctrine (*Siddhānta Patra*) of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya*. This *vāda* text is a detailed exposition of that letter. The principles elaborated within the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-bhāṣya* are categorically presented and revisited within the *vāda* text.

The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Siddhānta-Sudhā* is divided into nine sections. It begins with a description of the two divine entities. Akṣara and Puruṣottama. The text then discusses valid means of knowledge, which include *pratyakṣa* (perception), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (comparison) and *śabda* (verbal testimony, and

continues by presenting a narration on *māyā*, *jīva*, and *īśvara*. Thereafter, upon offering an explanation of *sādhana*, the text concludes with an elaboration on *mukti* (liberation). Every discussion within this text concludes with *kārikās*, or verses, that encapsulate the *saṃpradāya*'s principles. A total of 458 *kārikās* are composed within this text. They are collectively known as *Svāminārāyaṇa- Siddhānta - Kārikās* or *Akṣara-Puruṣottama -Darśana- Saṃgraha*.

6.2.5 Opinions:

Prof. N. S. Rāmānuja Tātācārya, one of the most senior and renowned scholars in Navaya Nyāya and Rāmānuja Vedanta, acclaims: “The work presented by Sādhu Bhadrēśadāsa is a monumental exposition of a novel philosophy and is a priceless contribution to the world. I have examined the text, not merely from *sāṃpradāyika* viewpoint, but also from a literary Sanskrit perspective that is characteristic of the traditional Vedic *Sanātana Dharma*, and from a developed Vedanta dialectic viewpoint. I have found it to be of great service to the development of both. I have also found it to be useful to all due to its richness in spiritually elevated thoughts. I have also observed it from a scholarly perspective, and by my evaluation, I highly praise the commentary's classical style and Sanskrit diction. I offer it my great, affection-filled blessings.”⁶⁷

Prof. R. Kṛṣṇāmurti Śāstrī states: “The *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* on the *Brahmasūtras* authored by the renowned Bhadrēśadāsa Svāmī is lucid. It is like a fruit-giving tree in the palm of one's hand. The author's style is elegant and full of emotion. He has produced the exceedingly eminent *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya*.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Tātācārya Rāmānuja, A brief introduction to *Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam* on the *Prasthānatrayī*. Navi Mumabai. This was written in *Samskṛta* by himself with his signature.

⁶⁸ Prof. R. Kṛṣṇāmurti Śāstrī (*Mahāmahopādhyāya*), Journal of the BAPS *Svāmīnārāyan* Research Institute, Akṣaradhāma New Delhi, p.168

Prof. V. S. Viṣṇupotṭy extols: “Sādhū Bhadrēśadāsa’s creation has blossomed into a thought-provoking testament that will strengthen the faith of all followers of the Svāmīnrayana way of life. This is yet another jewel positioned within a necklace made up of *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* that complements the beauty of the mother like *Upaniṣad*.”⁶⁹ “Sādhū Bhadrēśadāsa has vested meticulous effort in authoring the commentaries on the *Prasthānatrayī* and has succeeded in advancing the field of Vedānta philosophy. He has offered a detailed discussion on the significant principles of the Akṣara Puruṣottama philosophy and had done full justice to the subject. Its creation bears testament to his thorough research, penetrating insight, and sound knowledge of the Sanskrit language and philosophy.”⁷⁰

7. Conclusion

The main goal of the first introductory chapter was to determine the basic principles that provide a strong foundation to understand the Vedic Indian tradition. This chapter contributes in several ways to our understanding of the thesis, which is based on the Indian Vedānta and the Svāmīnārāyaṇa tradition. The six ancient *darśana*; Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta are briefly introduced here. Moreover, the six prominent Vedic *darśanas*: *Advaita*, *Viśiṣṭadvaita*, *Dvaita*, *Dvaitādvaita*, *Śuddhādvaita*, and *Acintyabheda*; are narrated here, which play a vital role to differentiate the Svāmīnārāyaṇa darshan from those darshans. The introduction of the Prasthānatrayī śāstra (*Upaniṣad*, *Gītā*, and *Brahmasūtra*) and the *Bhāṣya* tradition enrich this chapter. As far as Svāmīnārāyaṇa tradition is concerned, we have briefly provided the life and work of Svāmīnārāyaṇa and its live Guruparampara. More importantly, the two scriptures, the Vacanāmṛta and the Svāmīnārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas, which play a major role in the thesis, are deeply introduced in the chapter. The entire introductory

⁶⁹ Prof. V. S. Viṣṇupotṭy, *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁷⁰ Prof. M. M. Agravala, *Ibid.*

chapter is structured in such a manner that even an outsider can understand the basic principles of the thesis.

CHAPTER – 2

ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF EPISTEMOLOGY

1. *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā* (Epistemology)

Epistemology is one of the main branches of philosophy. It is a systematic study of the nature of knowledge, means of valid knowledge, and the process of attaining knowledge.⁷¹ Knowledge is gained by a process that involves senses, mind, and jiva. It is the explicit information procured by the process of reason applied to reality. In short, epistemology is the source that leads us towards the ultimate truth. Before we start to analyze the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya in light of the *Vacanāmṛta* in this chapter, we should understand the basic nature and form of epistemology in Vedic tradition.

1.1 Epistemology in Vedic Tradition:

Epistemology in Vedic tradition provides a profound way to attain the ultimate knowledge. It is based on a realist methodology.⁷² From ancient times, the scholars, researchers, analysts, pandits, and thinkers of India put a rigorous effort to search for the ultimate truth. Although the base was pure spirituality, yet they never stopped to ask vigorous questions to themselves relentlessly. As a result, they developed an efficient method to find the final truth. Therefore, the development of epistemology in India was the result of a constant quest to reach the ultimate blissful goal.⁷³ It has the hardness of logic and the eternal fruit at the end.⁷⁴ In other words, we can put forward that Indian epistemology is well organized, deeply rooted, superbly classified, and immensely fruitful. It is one of the great efforts at the construction of a substantiality, that the world has ever seen⁷⁵. It is a kind of pure

⁷¹ Joerg tuske, Indian epistemology and metaphysics, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 4

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.1

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.1

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.1

⁷⁵ Karl H. Potter, Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Motilala Banarasidasa, Varanasi, 1977, p.1

justification.⁷⁶ Although, here we have to take into account that the number of *pramāṇa* in different schools of Vedanta is also different.

1.2 Acceptance of *Pramāṇa* in Various *Darśana* Traditions:

Bhadreśadāsa explains the significance of the *pramāṇas* in a significantly facilitated way:

अकास्त्वर्यं वैपरीत्यं च तथैव संशयादिकम्।

अपाकृत्य विबोधने प्रमाणमुपकारकम् ॥SSSK 230॥

“To eradicate imperfection, adversity, and doubt and to gain true knowledge these *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge) are significant.” However, the actual number of *pramāṇa* varies from school to school. The *Cārvākas* accepted *pratyakṣa* (direct perception) as the only source of knowledge. The Buddhist and *Vaiśeṣikas* added one more, namely *anumāna* (inference). “The *Sāṃkhya* put a third viz; *śabda* (revelation-verbal authority). The *Naiyāyikas* added fourth viz, *upamāna* (analogy). The Prabhākara’s *Mīmamsakas* acknowledged a fifth *arthāpatti* (implication), and the Bhaṭṭas a sixth one, *anupalabdhi* (non-apprehension). A theory of knowledge, or epistemology, therefore precedes ontology or the theory of reality or being. All the *ācāryas* of *Bhakti* Vedanta Schools follow this time-honored method. Sankarācārya accepts all six sources of knowledge. Ramanujācārya takes three: perception, inference, and verbal testimony.

This increase in the number of *pramāṇa* is the result of freedom (विचारस्वातन्त्र्यम्) so that different founders have different *pramāṇa* or means of knowledge to know the highest reality, self, world, their relation, the concept of final freedom and the means to reach it. “प्रत्यक्षमनुमानं च वेदाश्चोपमया सह”⁷⁷ However, every branch believes that the supreme reality of Vedanta philosophy can be attained only through perfect

⁷⁶ Karl H. Potter, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-12

⁷⁷ C. V. Śaṅkara Rāu In A glossary of Philosophical Terms: 56, Madras, 1941

pramāṇa. As mentioned, - “प्रमाणमन्तरेण नार्थप्रतिपत्तिः । नार्थप्रतिपत्तिमन्तरेण प्रवृत्तिसामर्थ्यं । प्रमाणेन खल्वयं ज्ञातार्थमुपलभ्य तमीप्सति व जिहासति वा । तस्य इप्सजिहासाप्रयुक्तस्य समीहा प्रवृत्तिरित्युच्यते ।” (वात्स्यायनभाष्यम् १/१/१/)⁷⁸. “Without the valid means, there is no knowledge of substances and without knowledge, there is no activity. After attaining the true knowledge of the substances, one tends to wish or to abandon it. The action which includes to wish or to abandon is called *pravṛtti*.” “तथा हि प्रमेयादीनां तावत्पदार्थानां तत्त्वज्ञानं प्रमाणतत्त्वज्ञानाधीनम् ।” (न्यायवार्तिकतात्पर्यटीका १/१/१/)⁷⁹ “The knowledge of the knowable substances is depended on the valid means of knowledge.” “नैतावता विना प्रमाणेन शशविषाणं प्रतिपद्येमहि ।” (शाबरभाष्यम् १/१/५/)⁸⁰ “Without the valid means of knowledge we have to realize the horns of a rabbit (which does not exist).”

1.3 *Pramāṇas*: Basic Introduction

Here, we will discuss the principal means (source) of knowledge in the Indian Vedic tradition.

1.3.1 Perception

Annama Bhaṭṭa defines perception as “तत्र प्रत्यक्षज्ञानकरणं प्रत्यक्षम् । इन्द्रियार्थसन्निकर्षजन्यं ज्ञानं प्रत्यक्षम्⁸¹” Knowledge produced by proximity of sense and object is perception. Its instrumental cause is sense. Gautama defines perception: “इन्द्रियार्थसन्निकर्षोत्पन्नं ज्ञानमव्यपदेश्यमव्यभिचारि व्यवसायात्मकं प्रत्यक्षम्” (NS 1/1/4) In this manner, sense perception is considered a direct means of knowledge. Therefore, almost every tradition in Indian *darśanic* thought accepts it. In order to remove many epistemological issues, perception is considered a foundational source of knowledge.

⁷⁸ Nyayadarshana- vatsyayan bhashya sahitam-Viśvanāthakrit vrutti sahitam- Ashubodha Vidya Bhushan and Nitya Bodha Vidya Ratna, Caukhambā Sanskrit pratishtanam Banārasi, p.1

⁷⁹ Vācaspati Miśra, Nyāyavārtika Tātparyatikā, Vol I, Kashi, Caukhambā, Banaras, 1925, p.4

⁸⁰ Yudhiṣṭhira Mīmāṃsaka, Sabara-Bhāṣya, Trans. Ganganatha Jha, vol-1, oriental Institute, 1973, p.25

⁸¹ Bhaṭṭa Annama, Tarka Saṃgraha, with Hindī Vyākhyā - Brahmacārīṇī Gītā Banarjī, Caukhambā Vidyā Bhavanā, Vārāṇasī, 2012, p.80

1.3.2 Inference

Annama Bhaṭṭa explains: ‘अनुमितिकरणम् अनुमानम्’⁸² An inference is the knowledge that emerges from the deduction. Anuman is dependent on first knowledge, the knowledge that follows another knowledge. To define the *sādhya*, they explain the medium of some mark that is called reason. The base of inference is invariable concomitance. The subject, where the *sādhya* lies is already defined with the *parāmarśa*. When one perceives smoke on a distant hill, one recalls his or her experience on the common concomitance between smoke and fire. As a result, he concludes that there is fire on that hill.

1.3.3 Verbal Testimony

Śabda (Verbal Testimony) is a means to valid knowledge which is accepted by all *bhakti* traditions.⁸³ Since there are a lot of definitions of verbal testimony but Annama Bhaṭṭa puts it in a simple way: “आप्तवाक्यं शब्दः। आप्तस्तु यथार्थवक्ता। वाक्यं पदसमूहः। यथा गाम् आनयेति शक्तं पदम्। अस्मात् पदाद् अयम् अर्थो बोद्धव्य इतीश्वरसंकेतः शक्तिः॥”⁸⁴ *Śabda* is a statement of a trustworthy person (*Āptavākya*) and consists in understanding its meaning. That person may be human or divine. The scriptures are written or explained by the ancient sages. Hence, they are trustworthy. Vedas and Vedic literature fall into this category too. Even for human trustworthy persons, if their words are spoken in a particular sense are valid.

1.3.4 Analogy and Similarity

‘*Upa*’ and ‘*māna*’ collectively express the meaning ‘*upamāna*’ (analogy and similarity). The word ‘*upa*’ explains similarity and the term ‘*māna*’ means ‘cognition’. Therefore, *upamāna* as a means of knowledge is derived from the resemblance between two objects. It is a means of knowledge of the relation

⁸² Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, p. 95

⁸³ Bilimoriyā Puruṣottama, *Sabdaprarnaa: Word and Knowledge*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, AA Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 1988, p.14

⁸⁴ Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, 2012, p. 158

between a word and its denotation. When the knowledge emerges due to similarity, it falls in this stratum. According to the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophy, which advocates, as we see in the words of Annam Bhaṭṭa: “उपमितिकरणम् उपमानम्। संज्ञासंज्ञिसंबन्धज्ञानम् उपमितिः। तत्करणं सादृश्यज्ञानम्”⁸⁵ “Comparison or the recognition of likeness is the cause of an inference from similarity.”

1.3.5 Presumption

The *Mīmāṃsaka* and *Advaitīns* claim *Arthāpatti* (presumption) as a special source of valid knowledge. Moreover, the *Advaitīns* assume *arthāpatti* as a right way of cognition: ‘तत्रोपपाद्यज्ञानेनोपपादक-कल्पनमर्थापत्तिः।’⁸⁶ The term “*arthāpatti*” is a group of two words; first ‘*artha*’ and second ‘*āpatti*’. *Artha* means fact and *āpatti* shows imagination. Therefore, this means of knowledge removes the issue between fact and fact and imagination. For instance,

“पीनो देवदत्त दिवा न भुङ्क्ते”

Devadatta is a fat boy who never eats food during the day. In this example, two statements are shown which are against each other. In this case, presumption comes and solves the problem and leads us to the right knowledge that Devadatta eats food at night. The *Upaniṣad* reveals, ‘तरति शोकम् आत्मविद्’ (CU 7/1/3) ‘the knower of the soul transcends sorrow’ indicates the perishable nature of the world by the implementation of postulation.⁸⁷

1.3.6 Non-cognition

Anupalabdhī (non-cognition) is the instant knowledge of the non-existence of things. The *Advaitins* and Kumārīla accept *Anupalabdhī* but Prabhākara refutes it.⁸⁸

The *Vedānta Paribhāṣā* defines *Anupalabdhī* as: ‘ज्ञानकरणाजन्याभावानुभवासाधारण-

⁸⁵ Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, p.154

⁸⁶ Adhvarindra Dharmarājā, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, Ed., Gajñāna na Śāstrī, Caukhambā Vidya Bhavana, Vārāṇasī, 2015, p. 466

⁸⁷ Adhvarindra Dharmarājā, *op.cit.*, p.269

⁸⁸ Dāsaguptā Surendranātha, *A history of indian philosophy vol-1*, Motilāla Banārasīdāsa, Varanasi, p.379

करणमनुलब्धिरूपं प्रमाणम्⁸⁹ “The mean of valid knowledge known as non-cognition is the special cause of that apprehension of non-existence which is not due to knowledge as an instrument.” Non-cognition was invariably used to refute other’s philosophical positions in ancient philosophical debates in India.

1.3.7 Suppositional Reasoning

Annama Bhaṭṭa describes: ‘व्याप्यारोपेण व्यापकारोपस्तर्कः यथा यदि वह्निर् न स्यात् तर्हि धूमोऽपि न स्याद् इति॥’⁹⁰ If there is not the existence of fire means there is no possibility of smoke. Using positive correlations of invariable concomitance, the philosopher uses its negative correlations to refute others’ positions. As a result, a doubt in the form of effect might arise without a cause. It is a kind of pure logic. For example, smoke and fire are positively related as far as their existence is concerned, but by saying if there is no fire means there is no smoke, they make it very difficult for the opponents to make put arguments right. This argument is also found in the *Nyāya-sūtra* and other works.⁹¹

In this way, epistemology in the Indian Vedic tradition has a profound and significant value in understanding the Vedic principles in their respective school of Vedānta. Before we proceed to analyze the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana found in the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* on the basis of epistemology, the above-mentioned study is inevitable to understand, grasp and differentiate the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School from others.

2. Analysis

The various systems of philosophy flourished and grew simultaneously in India. These teachings from the *ṛṣis*, *ācāryas*, and *avatāras* founded the base to emerge the branches of different *dārśanīc* tradition. In the eighteenth century, Parabrahman

⁸⁹ Adhvarindra Dharmarājā, *Vedānta Paribhāṣā*, *op.cit.*, p.279

⁹⁰ Bhaṭṭa Annama, *op.cit.*, p. 172

⁹¹ NS1/1/1

Puruṣottama Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa incarnated on earth. Through his revelation, he provided a unique, unprecedented contribution to Vedic knowledge. His teachings were compiled in his presence at that time. This compilation is called the *Vacanāmṛta*. The *Vacanāmṛta* is consisted of all principles of the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana. When a particular teacher delivered a message, it was studied and teachings were put into practice by a group of people whom it suited. Thus, was formed a School of Philosophy. Each system continued to coexist because it provided a theoretical and practical philosophy to meet the students' intellectual and emotional needs at different levels of realization. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya*, production of canon in the text form has been prolific practically since the *Sampradāya* inception, with the bulk consisting devotional hymns, sacred biographies, and theological treatises composed in Gujarati. Svāminārāyaṇa saw this textual production as essential to the growth of his *Sampradāya*, and encouraged his disciples to compose texts tirelessly, since “only the scriptures of one’s own *Sampradāya* will foster the *Sampradāya*” (Vac. Gadh. 2/58). While scholarly attention on *Svāminārāyaṇa* texts has focused primarily on devotional hymns and sacred biographies⁹², the genre of *Bhāṣya*, or commentary on *Hindū* sacred text, especially that covers the philosophy of Svāminārāyaṇa and identified as an authentic text was unavailable for two hundred years. Since it became the tradition that without *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* (commentary on the three basic scriptures of Hinduism- the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad- Gītā*, and the *Brahmasūtra*) the *Sampradāya* is not considered as a Vedic *Sampradāya*. School of Vedanta, as Francis X. Clooney observes, are at once systems of philosophy- with attendant conceptualizations of metaphysics, epistemology, soteriology, and so on – as well as systems of commentary and exegesis, in that they attempt to read revealed texts faithfully and then to read reality out of the texts.

⁹² Munṣī Kanhaiyālāl, *Gujarat and its Literature from Early Times to 1852*, Bhāratīya Vidyā Bhavana, Bombay, 1967

While there are freestanding treatises found within various schools articulating philosophical and theological positions, each school also takes seriously the imperative to develop these positions based on a careful verse by verse interpretations of the three canonical texts of the *Prasthānatrayī* mentioned above.⁹³ Finally, after two hundred years of Svāminārāyaṇa's time, *Sādhu* Bhadreśadāsa, the Bhāṣyakāra, an ascetic in the tradition, authored commentaries on ten principal *Upaniṣads*, the *Brahmasūtra* and the *Gītā*. The *Prasthānatrayī* Bhāṣyakāra claims that these commentaries are according to Svāminārāyaṇa's original teachings and doctrines. However, the period of two hundred years is enough to change the phenomenon of social, religious, and moral aspects. So, in this chapter, we will examine the analysis of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya in light of Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of epistemology.

3. *Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ*

In the case of the veridical knowledge of Parabrahman, generally, it starts initially with the thesis '*Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ*' means of knowledge establishes the correct nature of the knowable. (The knowledge of the knowable depends upon the means of knowledge). However, in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, we must take into account the unique principle regarding Indian epistemology as the Bhāṣyakāra Bhadreśadāsa states:

नित्योद्भासितबोधत्वान्मानाऽनधीनसिद्धितः।

मानवश्यं न वै मेयम् अक्षरपरमात्मनोः ॥⁹⁴

“As far as we talk about, the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman is not dependent on any means or source of knowledge. In fact, their knowledge is self-emerged forever.” Bhadreśadāsa goes even further that a person who has attained *brahmabhāva* due to the grace of Brahman and Parabrahman also does not need

⁹³ 'Binding the text: Vedānta as philosophy and commentary'. In *Texts in context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, Ed., Jeffrey R. Timm, State University of New York press.1999, pp.47-68.

⁹⁴ SSSK 226

these *pramāṇas* for attaining knowledge. Therefore, attainment of knowledge through the means of knowledge is subject to only *māyic jīvas* and *īśvaras*.⁹⁵ For the knowledge of the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, the reflection and meditation on this faith-based knowledge slowly brings about a conversion in the very being of the knower. Their same body apparatuses then cease to be material and become divinized to behold Parabrahman and His knowledge.

This happens sheerly on account of the will and the mercy of Parabrahman. What *śabda* disclosed and reason envisioned or inferred and senses pined to perceive is immediate, known in the form of direct integral vision or experience (*pratyakṣa darśana*) of the *ātman*. Since the senses and mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) have ceased to be *māyic* and have become divine/sentient so that Parabrahman as Parabrahman becomes known directly by the self (*ātman*). This is called ‘*Jīva -Sattā Tadāśrita anubhava jñāna*.’ Such knowledge is called *sākṣātkāra* i.e., the direct integral experience of a transcendental kind. However, this *māna-meya* process is not applicable for Brahman and Parabrahman. In fact, their knowledge is self-proven. They know everything everywhere at every time. They are the controller of all.⁹⁶ So, Bhadrēśadāsa explains the power of Paramātman: “यो वेत्ति युगपत् सर्वं प्रत्यक्षेण सदा स्वतः इत्याद्युक्तं नित्यं सर्वज्ञभूतं परमात्मानम्” (BUSB 2/4/14, p.33) “Paramātman Himself perceives everything together at once and at any point of time; thus He is the all knower forever.”

Therefore, in the Svāminārāyaṇa context, ‘*meyādhīnā mānasiddhiḥ*’ prevails not ‘*mānādhīnā meyasiddhiḥ*’. Svāminārāyaṇa elucidates it in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Parabrahman perceives all of the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* who reside in the countless millions of realms as clearly as He sees a drop of water in His palm. He is also the supporter of countless millions of *brahmāndas*; He is the husband of Lakṣmī; and

⁹⁵ SSSK 227, 228

⁹⁶ SSSK 170

He is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of infinite millions of *brahmāndas*. Even Shesh, Shāradā, Brahmā , and other deities are unable to grasp the extent of His greatness. In fact, even the Vedas describe His glory as ‘*neti neti*’.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/53, pp.495-496). Moreover, he further adds this unlimited power of Parabrahman:

“I have knowledge of everything about the past, the present, and the future. In fact, while sitting here, I know everything that happens; even when I was in my mother’s womb, I knew everything; and even before I came into my mother’s womb, I knew everything. This is because I am Parabrahman.” (Vac. Jet. 5, p.699). The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman is not subject to judge with the man-made epistemological system. In the same vein the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra explains while commenting on the *Upaniṣad Mantra*:

यन्मनसा न मनुते येनाहुर्मनो मतम् ।

तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥⁹⁷

“That which the mind cannot conceptualize, but by which the mind does conceptualize, know that alone to be Parabrahman. Not the one whom people worship here.” “यन्मनसेत्यस्य दिव्यमनोबुद्ध्यादियुक्तस्याऽपि परमात्मनो न बद्धजीवेश्वरादिवत् करणाधीनोमननाऽध्यवसायादिव्यापारः, तस्य सदा स्वतःसिद्धविज्ञानत्वादित्यर्थः। एवं यच्चक्षुषेत्यादावग्रेऽप्ययमर्थोऽनुसन्धेयः ॥” (KUSB 1/6, p.40)

Here, ‘*yanmansa*’ reflects that though Parabrahman possesses the divine mind, intellect, etc. organs yet his process of attaining knowledge is not dependent on these instrumental organs. Since his knowledge is self-proven and self-emerged. It is true for each and every organ of Parabrahman which will be described in the *Upaniṣad* further.” The Bhāṣyakāra analyzes further that Parabrahman is beyond the reach of the eye, of speech, or of the mind. That which cannot be thought by

⁹⁷ KU 1/6

mind, but by which, they say, the mind is able to think: know that alone to be the Parabrahman. Parabrahman gives power to every organ of the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, thereby, they become able to attain knowledge, but Parabrahman doesn't need the *indriyas* or sense organs for attaining knowledge; thus, *Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ* is applicable only for *baddha* (bounded with *māyā*) *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates it in detail in the SSS.⁹⁸ Thus, The Bhāṣyakāra made no significant difference to the *Vacanāmṛta*'s principles. Thus, in the case of knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman, we can simply declare that in this context not '*Mānādhīnā Meyasiddhiḥ*' but '*Meyadhīnā Mānāsiddhiḥ*.'⁹⁹

4. *Pramāṇas* in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School

4.1 Numbers of *Pramāṇa*

We have presented the general view of the *pramāṇas* before, now our discussion of the notion of *pramāṇa* can only be brief here and only the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta perception will be underlined. So again, *pramāṇa* seeks to deal with the question of the possibility and grounds of the valid means of knowing. Bhagavān *Svāminārāyaṇa* puts weightage on the true knowledge and its sources (vac. Loyā-7, Kāriyāṇi-1, Sāraṅg-pura-18, Gaḍhaḍā 3/10). However, he accepts all those sources of knowledge which lead us towards the true knowledge of five eternal ontological entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman, and Parabrahman. Thereby, *Svāminārāyaṇa* is not bound by any particular source of knowledge. Sometimes he refers to true empirical knowledge (Loyā-7) for liberation. Sometimes inference (Loyā-17), testimony (Gaḍhaḍā-2/30) and analogy (Gaḍhaḍā-1/25) is also indicated to attain

⁹⁸ तत्कृपालब्धप्रज्ञानां ब्रह्मभूताऽऽत्मनां तथा।

सर्वार्थानां समुद्रासानैवाऽस्ति मानवश्यता ॥sssk - 227॥

अतो मानात् प्रमेयस्य सिद्धिरिति तु केवलम्।

बद्धात्मनियतं ज्ञेयं यद्वि वादेषु योज्यते ॥ sssk- 228॥

ज्ञानं प्रमात्मकं ज्ञेयं यथाऽवस्थितवस्तुनः।

यथा शुक्तावियं शुक्ती रजते रजतं तथा ॥sssk - 229॥

⁹⁹ KUSB 1/6, p.40

liberation. In addition to this, Svāminārāyaṇa mentions that Parabrahman's grace plays a vital role to attain true knowledge of eternal entities (Gaḍhaḍā-1/51, 78). Moreover, he highlights the *saṃbhāvya pramāṇa* (Kāriyāṇi-3) and *aitihya pramāṇa* (historical source) (Loyā-7) in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Thus, in the *Vacanāmṛta*, he indicated major sources of knowledge and opened the branch of any systematic path that fulfills the goal of attaining true knowledge. The *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya clearly mentions the significance of *Pramāṇa* (BSSB-1/1/1, 1/1/3; KeUSB-1/3; BUSB-2/4/5), however, like Svāminārāyaṇa, the Bhāṣyakāra is not bound with the fixed numbers of *Pramāṇa*. He averred- “ब्रह्मब्रह्मपरौ प्रमाणशतकैर्मायाऽधिपौ कीर्तितौ” (SSSK, Maṅgala) “There may be hundreds of *pramāṇa* to procure the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.” So, “सति सिद्धान्तप्रत्यनीकत्वे हि तद्वेयमन्यथा तु न खण्डनीयमिति न तन्निर्धारितसंख्यासमादर इति” (SSS p.149) “The *pramāṇa* which negate and obstruct to obtain knowledge of the eternal entities should be abjured, others are welcomed, in this manner, we do not claim any particular numbers of the *pramāṇa*.” Moreover, *Prasthānatrayī* Bhāṣyakāra strongly asserts that without the grace of Parabrahman, our *māyic* senses are incapable of attaining knowledge of the true form of those eternal entities.

4.2 *Laukika Pramāṇas* Fail to Realize Eternal Entities

Svāminārāyaṇa believes that *laukika* (worldly) *pramāṇas* fail to realize eternal entities like Brahman and Parabrahman. He proclaims: “*Māyic* substances can be comprehended by *māyic* means, and if one has comprehended Parabrahman through the same *māyic antahakaranas* and *indriyas* then it implies that Parabrahman must also be *māyic*.” (Vac. Gaḍh. 1/51, p.124). The Bhāṣyakāra elaborately substantiates this fact while commenting on the *Mantra*- ‘न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् गच्छति नो मन...’ (KU 1/3) “There, the eyes cannot travel, nor speech nor mind. Nor do we know how to explain it to the disciples. It is other than the known and beyond the unknown. So, were we taught by our great ancestors.”

Here, the Bhāṣyakāra comments: “चक्षुर्वाङ्मन इति त्रयं सकलबाह्यान्तःकरणानामुपलक्षणमतः सर्वेषामपि मायिकानामन्तर्बाह्येन्द्रियाणां परमात्मस्वरूपग्रहणेऽसामर्थ्यमिति प्रतिपादितम् । न च चक्षुरादिनैकेनैव सर्वेन्द्रियोप-लक्षणत्वसम्भवात्कथं वागादीनां पृथगुपन्यास इति वाच्यं, तात्पर्यविशेषेण तदुपादानम् । तथा चाऽत्र चक्षुरिति पदं प्रत्यक्षज्ञानकरणात्मकस्य प्रत्यक्षप्रमाणस्योपलक्षणम् । अतोऽलौकिकस्याऽपारस्य दिव्यस्य वाऽक्षराधिपतेर्दिव्यस्वरूपगुणादीनां साकल्येनग्रहणे लौकिकस्य सिमितदर्शिनो मायिकस्य घ्राणरसनचक्षुस्त्वक्छ्रोत्रात्मकस्य प्रत्यक्षप्रमाणभूतस्य ज्ञानेन्द्रियवर्गस्य नैव प्रसरावकाश इति लक्षितम् । तथा हि यथा लौकिकानां गृहदारापुत्रवृक्षपर्वतनद्यादीनां द्रव्याणां शब्दस्पर्शरूपरसगन्धादिगुणानां वा चक्षुरादितत्तदिन्द्रियसन्निकर्षात् प्रत्यक्षं ज्ञानं न तथा परमात्मपरस्वरूपस्य, तस्य तद्दिव्यगुणौघस्य चाऽत्यलौकिकत्वाद् अत्यपारत्वाद् अतीन्द्रियत्वाच्चेति पूर्वमेवोक्तम् ।”

“Here, eye, speech, and mind represent all the internal and external senses. The Upaniṣad assert their incapability to conceive the form of Parabrahman. One should not contend that indication of all senses could have been possible by just mentioning the eye sense since it has a particular purport. The eye represents perception, the source of direct knowledge. As a result, it becomes clear that *māyic* and limited eye sense is not able to gain the knowledge of Parabrahman thoroughly. The knowledge of divine and limitless Parabrahman is not possible as one procures the knowledge of house, wife, son, tree, mountain, river, etc. and five sense pleasures by just connection one’s eyes with the objects.” Further, the Bhāṣyakāra is analyzing the verbal testimony. “वागिति पदं लौकिकशब्दप्रमाणमुपलक्षयति । शब्दोऽपि सम्पूर्णतया तद्वर्णयितुं नैव समर्थः । तथा हि यथा लौकिकवस्तुविवरणं लोकव्यवहारो वा शब्दैर्निष्पाद्यते न तथा परं परमात्मस्वरूपं तद्गुणादिकं वा लौकिकशब्दैर्विवेक्तुं शक्यं, पूर्वोक्तादेव हेतोः । अपरं च लौकिकस्य शब्दस्य प्रत्यक्षोपजीव्यत्वाद् यदा तदुपजीवकस्य प्रत्यक्षस्यैव यथावत्साकल्येन परमात्मोपलब्धावगतिस्तदा स्यादेव तत्राऽकिञ्चित्करं तदुपजीव्यमिति भावः ।”

“Here, speech term is reflecting the worldly verbal testimony because even words alone cannot explain the form of Parabrahman thoroughly. As the worldly objects and behavior can be explained and comprehended by these words, not Parabrahman because it is a divine entity. Moreover, worldly words are dependent on perception; even perception itself is unable to grasp the form of Parabrahman thoroughly, then how can the depended words.” The Bhāṣyakāra further explains inference: “मनःपदं

मननशिरस्कमनुमानमुपलक्षयति । परब्रह्मकृत्स्नविज्ञप्तौ केवलस्याऽनुमानस्यापि नास्ति प्रवर्तनावकाशस्तस्यापि प्रत्यक्षोपजीव्यत्वादिति । एवं तत्स्वरूपगुणादेरपारपारत्वेनाऽपरिच्छिन्नत्वाच्च सर्वलौकिकप्रमाणाऽनवगम्यं कृत्स्नं परमात्मपरस्वरूपादिकमिति तात्पर्यम् ।” (KUSB 1/3, p. 36)

“In this context, the mind indicates inference. Since inference is based on a mental process after viewing an object via perception, due to inference’s dependency on worldly perception, it cannot cover the knowledge of Parabrahman. In this manner, due to Parabrahman’s inconceivable divine form, unfathomable qualities etc., these all worldly or *laukika* sources of knowledge fall short of attaining Parabrahman’s knowledge thoroughly.” Here, the Bhāṣyakāra explicitly mentions three major *pramāṇa*- perception, inference and textual words and acknowledges that to attain the supreme spiritual knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman, worldly *pramāṇa* or the means of knowledge fail, since worldly *pramāṇas* are potent only to obtain worldly knowledge.

Let us fathom this principle in detail. Firstly, the above-mentioned *Śruti* speaks of Parabrahman, as beyond the comprehension of mind, speech, and visual perception. Parabrahman is beyond *māyā* and its three *guṇas*. The *jñānendriya* and *karmendriya* (sensory-motor organs) have evolved from *rajoguṇa* and four divisions of *antaḥkaraṇa* (inner-organ) have evolved from *sattva-guṇa*. Thus, the organs external and internal are *māyic* (material), i.e., the products of *prakṛti-māyā* (matter). On the other hand, Parabrahman is beyond *māyā*, i.e., devoid of the trace of materiality. Therefore, how can non-*māyic* (divine) Parabrahman be ever comprehended through senses and mind that are *māyic* (material)? And what is grasped by *māyic* senses & mind has to be *māyic*! So, if the incarnate form of Parabrahman is ever known with *māyic* senses & mind, then Parabrahman whom they apprehend will be deemed to be *māyic*.

Secondly, everything comprehended through sensory-motor organs and mind (*indriya-antaḥkaraṇa*) fall in the category of perceptual knowledge or knowledge by inference (reason). Thus, as finite spirits are bound by the chains of *māyā*, we cannot know Parabrahman through perception and inference by just our common phraseology. Thirdly, knowledge by *śabda* (verbal testimony), though dependable, is also indirect mediate knowledge of Parabrahman for us, as it leaves us dependent on our imagination and inference (conjectures) based on it. Our conceptual framework, though based on words or scriptures, is still *māyic*, limited, mediate, and indirect. Fourthly, notwithstanding proficiency in scriptural words and well-formed conception of Parabrahman based on them, the great had failed to recognize and comprehend Parabrahman as Parabrahman when He actually was around them as the manifest incarnate Parabrahman in the form of Rāma or Kṛṣṇā. This again is marked from the records in the scriptures. Fifthly, besides Parabrahman is present around manifest incarnate-Parabrahman (*avatāra*), if one does not have the firm and accurate knowledge (conviction) of Parabrahman as Parabrahman (and not as a human or one like us), then even if they see Him, hear Him, touche Him, communicate and interact with Him - the knowledge so attained cannot be termed as the highest veritable knowledge. It would be mere observed knowledge on par with perceptual and/or rational knowledge psycho-physical instruments of knowing.

Thus, in lack of the knowledge of Parabrahman and acknowledgment of Him as the transcendental Parabrahman in the manifest form (*avatāra*), it may be termed as 'quasi-knowledge' or 'knowledge by courtesy' which may be termed as *rajoguṇa*. But when one transcends the psycho-physical limitations of *indriya-antaḥkaraṇa*, reaches beyond the scope of three *guṇas*, and comprehends Parabrahman through the vision of the atman in its pristine purity by the grace of Parabrahman Avatāra, he then is said to have attained the veritable knowledge of Parabrahman. Such a knowledge-experience is direct, immediate, and apodictic (*aparokṣa-jñāna*). It is

the highest knowledge (*ātyamṭika-jñāna*) that is a votary of ultimate emancipation. The *Svāminārāyaṇa* School discloses that our *māyic* sense organs are not capable enough to attain knowledge of the highest reality like Brahman and Parabrahman. Then what is the paramount source in order to attain the true knowledge of these eternal entities?

4.3 The In-contaminate Source of Knowledge

4.3.1 The cause of *Pramāṇa* and *Pramā*

Any particular object which is attainable or becomes a subject of knowledge is remained in its state due to the resolution of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman. Bhadrēśadāsa explains:

यत्संकल्पानुगं वस्तुभूतिस्थित्यादि सर्वदा ।

यत्संकल्पानुगं वस्तुस्वरूपधर्मनिश्चय ॥¹⁰⁰

“According to whose will the cause, sustenance, and destruction of objects eternally occur; according to whose will the form and qualities of objects are determined.”

At this point, *Svāminārāyaṇa* aims to give a comprehensive account of obtaining the true knowledge of the supreme reality. When Pūrṇānanda Svāmī asked this question that since Parabrahman transcends *māyā* how, then can one cultivate the conviction of Parabrahman through the *māyic antahakarana* ? Also, how can one perceive Parabrahman with one’s *māyic* eyes and other *indriyas*?¹⁰¹ *Svāminārāyaṇa* now disclosing the secret of the most critical issue of Indian epistemology through his answer. He reveals: “Out of kind-heartedness for the liberation of the *jīvas*, Parabrahman gives *darśana* in a manifested form to all of the inhabitants on this earth. At that time, if a person understands this greatness of Puruṣottama Bhagavāna by profound association with the *Sādhu* then all of his *indriyas* and *antahkarana*

¹⁰⁰ SSSK, p.146

¹⁰¹ Vac. Gadh. 1/51

become divine like Puruṣottama Bhagavāna's *indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇa* thereafter, through those *indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇa*, he can foster the conviction of that Parabrahman. The conviction of Parabrahman can only be cultivated through Parabrahman. In the same way, the *darśana* of Parabrahman is also possible only through Parabrahman, but it is not possible through the *māyic indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/51, p.125)

In this manner, Parabrahman, who transcends Akṣarabrahman, who is beyond mind and speech, and who is imperceptible - Himself, out of compassion, resolves, ‘May all the enlightened and unenlightened people of earth behold Me. Svāminārāyaṇa brings out this solution to Daharānand Svāmi's question in the *Vacanāmṛta*.¹⁰² Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa emphasizes that the supreme knowledge of eternal entities is procured only through the immense grace of Parabrahman. It is also worth noting that by the eternal wish of Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman is also capable of granting liberation to *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. Only these two eternal entities transcend *māyā* forever.¹⁰³ To understand that Akṣarabrahman is the highest entity after Parabrahman, Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “There is no greater status than that of an Akṣarabrahman *Sādhu* after Parabrahman. For example, in a kingdom, the queen's power is equal to that of the king. In the same manner, that *Sādhu* holds as much sovereignty as Parabrahman.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/22, p. 445)

As we discussed earlier that Brahman and Parabrahman are the main cause of knowledge. Because by their resolution, any object of this universe remains in its particular state. The conviction of the object is also determined by those two entities. Moreover, the way we are able to see or attain knowledge of any particular object is also provided by Brahman and Parabrahman. In fact, they are knowable

¹⁰² Vac. Gadh. 1/78, p.196

¹⁰³ Vac. Gadh. 1/7, 3/10

and at the same time, they give us the power to know them. The Bhāṣyakāra puts it in a poetic way:

यश्च प्रामाण्यनिर्णेता सर्वप्रामाण्यकारणम् ।
सर्वप्रामाण्यधीहेतुः सर्वप्रमाप्रदः प्रमी ॥
स्वामिनारायणं वन्दे ह्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमम् ।
प्रमाणपुरुषं वन्दे प्रमुखं तं गुरुं हरिम् ॥¹⁰⁴

“He who is the establisher of truth and the source of the means of knowledge; he who begets both knowledge of truth and true knowledge; and he who is the knower; I offer a bow to this entity, Svāminārāyaṇa, also known as Akṣara Puruṣottama. I also bow to Guru Hari Pramukha Svāmi Mahārāja, the manifest form of validation.”

These verses indeed explain the entire epistemology of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman along with the Guru, are determinants and cause of all *pramāṇa* and *pramā* (knowledge), they are the cause of intellect that obtains knowledge and provide the knowledge to a seeker, and are knowable. The supreme end of philosophical knowledge is the Parabrahman *Darśana*; the realization of the supreme entity in one’s life. It consists of going from empirical sense-perception to the inner eye of reason by the *antaḥkāraṇa* and finally, divine self sight blessed by Parabrahman himself. It is with this divine soul sight that one can behold Parabrahman as Parabrahman with all his transcendental greatness, glory, and divinity. No other means are worthy of knowing him thoroughly in order to attain ultimate liberation. Because this Parabrahman is not to be attained through discourses or delivering the speeches on the scriptures, through intellect, the mere use of logic or through much of hearing of scriptures. That who is selected as an eligible devotee for His grace that alone devotee attains Parabrahman. To such a one, this Parabrahman reveals its true nature.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ SSSK, p.146

¹⁰⁵ नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेधया न बहुना श्रुतेन।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनू स्वाम् ॥ MU 3/2/3 ॥

Bhadreśadāsa explains while commenting this verse: “तर्हि कथं लभ्य इत्यत आह एषः परमदयासागरोऽक्षरधामाधिपतिः सहजानन्दो महाप्रभुः यं स्वैकनिष्ठमुपासकं वृणुते कृपया स्वीकरोति, यस्मिन् प्रीतो भवतीत्यर्थः । तेनैव परमात्मकृपाभाजनेनोपासकेन एष परमात्मा लभ्यः साक्षात्कर्तुं शक्यः। यतः एषः कृपानिधिः आत्मा परमात्मा तस्य स्वदिव्यप्रणयपात्रस्योपासकस्य कृते तस्मा इत्यर्थः । स्वां तनुं स्वं दिव्यं स्वरूपं, विवृणुते प्रकाशयति साक्षात्कारयतीत्यर्थः॥”

“Then how can one able to know the form of Parabrahman? The answer to this question is to whom Parabrahman chooses would be able to conceive his divine form. Since Parabrahman is the ocean of mercy, He Himself becomes pleased on the seeker. So through only grace of Him, one can attain or have the *sākṣātkāra* of Parabrahman. Parabrahman reveals his own self for the seeker afterward he or she can know Him.”

The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya clarifies: ‘तत्र मुख्यसाधनमाह’ the prominent endeavor to have a *sākṣātkāra* is Parabrahman. “एतेन परमात्मा न स्वतःकल्पितसाधनसाध्योऽपि तु तत्कृपैकसाध्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्” (MUSB 3/2/3, p.293) “Parabrahman thus remains '*Kṛpā Sādhya*', attainable by grace alone. This is the ultimate principle.” This same *mantra* is also located in the *Kaṭha-Upaniṣad*; hence, it is commented on in the same way.¹⁰⁶

The theme of distinction here is the supremacy of Parabrahman’s will and love for His devotees. His compassion sees no limitations in them, and thus, He wills to disclose His transcended divine form (nature) before them. And when He wills so graciously, He becomes one like a human and manifests before them as incarnate Parabrahman, enabling them to know. He also brings about a conversion in their being (in their perception). Therefore, affectionate-caring-accessibility and His most benevolent will (*Kṛpā-saṃkalpa*) are the only factors that make

“Paramātmān cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing [i.e. learning]. He is attained only by the one whom Paramātmān chooses. To such a one, Paramātmān reveals his own form.”

¹⁰⁶ KUSB 2/23, p. 119.

Parabrahman's knowledge and realization in the lives of His devotees a fact of experience. When Parabrahman wills - Let I be known and approached by my seekers, nothing prevents a seeker from realizing or knowing Him and enjoying His Company.

4.3.2 Parabrahman's Innermost Will

This is Parabrahman's innermost will and resolution that the seekers may know his form. Hence, through His own will and power, He becomes conceivable. Svāminārāyaṇa explains: "Parabrahman - who transcends Akṣarabrahman, who is beyond mind and speech, and who is imperceptible - Himself, out of compassion, resolves, 'May all the enlightened and unenlightened people on earth behold Me.' Having resolved in this manner, Parabrahman - whose will always reigns - becomes perceivable to all people on earth out of compassion." (Vac. Gadh. 1/78, p.196) Furthermore, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya reveals this truth in the context of the *Śruti*¹⁰⁷ that describes Parabrahman as inconceivable to all our *māyic indriyas*.

The Bhāṣyakāra asserts on the base of this *Śruti* that Parabrahman is beyond the reach of the eye (perception), of speech (verbal testimony), or of the mind (inference). Thus, Parabrahman is beyond the known and unknown. Yet, it is knowable in some way. Here, Bhāṣyakāra argues admirably with the appropriate references of the scriptures: "इदमत्रावधेयम् । न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् न मन इत्यादिको निषेधो न परब्रह्मणः सर्वथैव तत्तदिन्द्रियजन्यज्ञानाऽगोचरत्वेनात्यन्ताऽवाच्यत्वमेव ब्रूतेऽपि त कार्त्स्न्येन तज्ज्ञानाऽगोचरत्वमेव तस्याऽपारत्वाद् अन्यथा तु 'आत्मा वाऽरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः' (बृ. ४/५/६ (इत्याद्युपदेशवैयर्थ्यं, परब्रह्मवेदनमार्गाप्रामाणिकत्वप्रसङ्गाऽऽपत्तिश्च)"¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् गच्छति नो मनः (के.उप. १/३)

¹⁰⁸ KeUSB 1/3, p..37, also तथा च यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि ई. १६, - बृ. ५/१५/१, 'तद्विजिज्ञासस्व' - तै.३/१/१, 'य एतदेवं विद्वान्' - छा. १/९/२, 'एष तु वा अतिवदति यः सत्येनाऽति वदति - छा. ७/१६/१, 'सततं कीर्तयन्तो माम्' - गी. ९/१४, 'अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं मत्वा'- कठ. २/१२

“One should be aware of this fact that here, this *Śruti* does not debar that Parabrahman is not knowable by any sense organs or means. However, the supreme reality is beyond the apprehension of *māyic indriya*, yet it is His will and wish that the inhabitants of the *Mṛtyuloka* (earth) may perceive him. Consequently, by the auspice of Parabrahman, only seekers become able to realize him. Otherwise, the *Śrutis* that endorse Parabrahman as a knowable entity will be objected.” “स एव सहजानन्दः परमात्मा स्वयमेव सङ्कल्प्य कृपया स्वभक्तमनोरथसंपूरणादिप्रयोजनेन स्वस्वरूपसामर्थ्याद्यजहन्नेवाऽवतरति, तदा स्वयमेव सङ्कल्पयति ज्ञानिनोऽज्ञानिनश्च मां प्रत्यक्षीकुर्वन्त्विति तदाऽगोचरोऽपि स नयनगोचरो भवत्येव। एवं तस्य नरनाट्यस्वीकारेऽपि तत्स्वभावगुणादीनामपारत्वादेव मनुष्यरूपोऽप्ययं परमात्मा न सम्पूर्णतया ज्ञातुं शक्य इत्यत उच्यते न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छतीत्यादि। वस्तुतस्तु न हि चक्षुरादिना घटादितुच्छवस्तुजातमपि साकल्येन ग्रहीतुं शक्यं, कुतः पुनरक्षराधिपतिः। परमात्मेत्यलं विस्तरेण ।” (KeUSB 1/3, p. 37)

“When Sahajānanda Parabrahman Himself incarnates on the earth to fulfill the wishes of his devotees out of grace, then He resolves that whether one with wisdom or without wisdom may perceive me. In this way, He, who is inconceivable, becomes conceivable to all. However, He assumes a human form and acts according to it so that He is not thoroughly known to all. This is the reason why the *Śruti* rejects the knowability of Parabrahman. In fact, we cannot perceive the jar and cloth, etc., thoroughly than how can see the Paramātmā perfectly?”

In other words, He alone knows the meaning and import of the *Śrutis*, which He intends to convey in relation to His essential nature and His highest glory. Therefore, the only means left to our disposal is to go to Parabrahman to explain the true import of the Vedas, thereby the knowledge of Parabrahman, directly from Him. Thus, the *prima facie* requirement to know the Ultimate Reality (Parabrahman) is the vision, which Parabrahman Himself grants, out of His flooding grace. Parabrahman, out of grace and concern for the seekers of Truth, divinizes the sensory-motor apparatuses and the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) of the seekers,

which enables them to have the vision of this Ultimate Reality ... Parabrahman Himself) as revealed in the sacred scriptures. The conceptual understanding of this vision follows as a consequence of His own wish. There are others *Śrutis* where the Bhāṣyakāra defines the above-mentioned facts,¹⁰⁹ which assert that Parabrahman is the actual means to realize the eternal ontological entities.

4.4 Grace to *Pramāṇas*: The Divine Birth on Earth

When we meticulously study the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta*, we clearly discover one fundamental fact that both scriptures accept the grace of Parabrahman as the most significant factor to attain the knowledge of the eternal entities. In addition to this, they both accept that the seeker can obtain this knowledge in his very life and Parabrahman discloses his true form for him; at this point, we can say there must be Parabrahman in the human form. From both points of perspective, the knowledge is nothing else but of the manifest form of Parabrahman on earth. In the field of epistemology, it is a novel contribution indeed. Svāminārāyaṇa declares his important doctrine in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Please listen, I want to tell all of you about Parabrahman. Whenever a *jīva* attains a human body in Bharatakhaṇḍa, Parabrahman’s *avatāras* or Parabrahma’s *Sādhu* will certainly also be present on earth at that time. If that *jīva* can recognize them, then he becomes a devotee of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Var. 19, p. 567)

This principle emphasizes that the source or means of knowledge is Parabrahman Himself, who comes to earth to provide knowledge of Him to the infinitive numbers of seekers. When the manifest form of Parabrahman roams on earth, then by his grace, the seeker’s *māyic indriya* becomes divinized.¹¹⁰ Thus, knowing Parabrahman perfectly means knowing the manifest form of Parabrahman through

¹⁰⁹ “प्रविलीयन्ति साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुकृपया विलुप्ता भवन्तीति ब्रह्मविद्यावतो

‘सत्येन लभ्यस्तपसा ह्येष आत्मा सम्यग्ज्ञानेन’ (मु. ३/१/५), ‘न चक्षुषा इत्यादावुक्तानि गृह्यते नापि वाचा ... ज्ञानप्रसादेन विशुद्धसत्त्वस्ततस्तु तं पश्यते’ (मु. ३/१/८)

¹¹⁰ Vac. Gaḍhāḍī-1/51

the *indriyas*, the *antaḥkaraṇa*, and experience. Only then can one be said to possess perfect *jñāna*.¹¹¹ Here, *Pratyaksh Bhagwan* (the manifest human form of Parabrahman) are important words. Only His knowledge is called ultimate knowledge and is the cause for liberation for a *jīva*. It has previously been observed that this principle (Parabrahman manifests on earth) is essential to Svāminārāyaṇa, thereby he indicates it invariably in the *Vacanāmṛta*.¹¹² The Bhāṣyakāra defines this doctrine (Parabrahman manifests on earth as a human) while commenting on the *Bhagavad- Gītā śloka*, which explains that whenever there is a major decline of *dharma* and the rise of *adharma*, then Parabrahman incarnates.¹¹³

The BGSB explores: “तदात्मानं सृजामि अवतीर्णो भवामि इत्यर्थः । कदाचित् स्वेच्छया अन्यजीवेश्वरात्मनो नुप्रविष्य कदाचित् साक्षादेव संभवामि इति भवः ॥” (BGSB 4/7, p. 95) “Parabrahman by his independent will, sometimes He himself manifests or sometimes He manifests through the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* by reentering them.” In a similar manner, the *Brahmasūtra* is also intimately allied with this principle. The Bhāṣyakāra contends against the *Naiyāyika* that Parabrahman’s human form is well endorsed by us but not by logical argument. Instead, we approve it by verbal testimony. The commentary demonstrates it in the context of the *sūtra* (aphorism): शास्त्रयोनित्वात् ॥ BS 1/1/3॥ “Because of its root in the scriptures.” Bhadreśadāsa enunciates: “यद्यपि सशरीरत्वं त्वस्माकम् अपि इष्टमेव किन्तु नहि तदनुमानिकमपि तु श्रौतमेव दिव्यं शरीरं, साकृतिकस्यैव दिव्यमानुषविग्रहस्य तस्य सकलकारणत्वश्रुतेः ।” (BSSB 1/1/3, p. 22) “Parabrahman’s definite human form is well sanctioned by us but not by logical system. As a replacement, we approve it by verbal testimony. The cause of this human form of Parabrahman with a definite form which is described in the *Shrutis*.”

¹¹¹ Vac. Loyā 7, p. 303

¹¹² Vac. Gaḍhaḍā 1/3,27,31,37,38,49,56; Kāriyāṇi 2,8; Pāñcālā 6,7; Gaḍhaḍā 2/35; Gaḍhaḍā 3/28,31,35,38; Ahmedabadm 6,7 Moreover, in the Svāminārāyaṇa School *Akṣarabrahman* also incarnates on earth together with Parabrahman. (Vac. Gad. 1/71, p.174)

¹¹³ BG 4/7

The way the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya supports this significant principle serves as a profound bond on which the entire *Sampradāya* is standing. The *Upaniṣad Bhāṣya* also joins by propagating: “सहजानन्दः परमात्मा स्वयमेव सङ्कल्प्य कृपया स्वभक्तमनोरथसंपूर्णादिप्रयोजनेन स्वस्वरूपसामर्थ्याद्यजहन्नेवाऽवतरति” (KUSB 1/3, p. 37) “Sahajānanda Parabrahman, by His own resolution, Himself incarnates on the earth to fulfill the wishes of his devotees out of grace with all His power.” Then, He resolves that whether one with wisdom or without wisdom may perceive me. In this way, He, who is inconceivable, becomes conceivable to all. Due to his resolution, Parabrahman, who has no worldly birth and death, incarnates on earth and the seeker can obtain his true knowledge.¹¹⁴

The most startling and striking observation to emerge from these references is the firm and positive correlation among all *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣyas*. In this sequence, the Bhāṣyakāra wants to add a significant matter that along with Parabrahman Akṣarabrahman, also incarnates on earth. The Bhāṣyakāra reminds us by quoting the *Īsopaniṣad mantra*, which reflects that Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman moves and also moves not. They are far and near. They are inside all this and also outside all this.¹¹⁵ “तत् पूर्वोक्तम् अक्षरतत्त्वं पुरुषोत्तमतत्त्वं च एजति गच्छति मुमुक्षोः कल्याणेच्छया कृपया मुमुक्षुदेशं प्रति गच्छति, तत्र मनुष्यादिरूपेण अवतरति ।” (IUSB 5, p.14) “Here ‘*tad*’ refers to Akṣara and Puruṣottama entities as per the context of the first mantra. They take a human form on the earth to grant liberation to a number of the *jīvas* while remaining in Akṣaradhāma with their root form.”

Parabrahman, when by His will descends as the incarnate- Parabrahman on earth, He does so with a purpose and a mission to fulfill the wish of devotees, and therefore, assumes a form appropriate to it. These forms of Parabrahman are

¹¹⁴ “अजायमानो बहुधा विजायते” (Shukla YajurVeda 31/19)

¹¹⁵ IU 5

perceptually apprehendable by the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) and the sensory-motor organs of the *jīvas*.

Now, let us talk about the obstacles in knowing the ultimate realities. As long as the dark cover of *avidyā-karma* (past action-nescience) and the viruses of three *guṇas* of *prakṛti* (*māyā*) are there in the self (*jivātman*), a person cannot have the resolute knowledge of Parabrahman in terms of self-satiating realization. Therefore, the body, the sensory-motor organs, the vital breath (*prāṇa*) and the *antaḥkaraṇa* (mind) should become dematerialized (*amāyic*) to behold this knowledge-realization in the self. When all these body-apparatuses are totally divinized by the grace of Parabrahman or the Parabrahman-possessed *Sādhū* (i.e., The Akṣara-Guru), the knowing self becomes absolutely pure, dross-free and divine. Consequently, the Parabrahman present before him in the manifest human-guise is then apprehended as through and through the divine, transcendental, and infinitely glorious.

Therefore, when the total being of the self is transformed into a kind of divine person, his vision then changes. His psycho-physical apparatuses of knowing, his perception, and his conceptual framework are all divinized. With the divinized vision and divinized instruments of knowing, he now is able to know and behold the glorious divine nature of infinite Parabrahman even in His incarnate (currently manifest) human-form. Now, Parabrahman for him, is no more human, though participating in his life as one among humans in the guise of a human person (as the manifest incarnation). Thus, for such devotees with purified vision, Parabrahman is no more unknown and unknowable. Then the question may arise that the *Śruti* which proclaims that ‘*yato vāco nivartante aprāpya mānasaā saha*¹¹⁶!’ “Wherefrom words/speech turn back, together with the mind failing to know Him.”

¹¹⁶ Taittirīya Upaniṣad -2/4/1

“*Naiva vācā na mānasaā prāptum śakyo ma cakṣuṇā*¹¹⁷.” “The Supreme Self cannot be known or reached by speech, by mind or eyes.” What should be understood? Well, in this case, the *Śrutis* talks about the inability of the commoners and seekers undevoted to Parabrahman. In the case of loving devotees of Parabrahman, He is undoubtedly knowable, sheerly by His connate mercy (*vātsalya*).

Thus, Parabrahman as Parabrahman, in terms of His essential nature, as supreme and divine and infinite, is known and knowable veritably. Of course, this implies that Parabrahman is not fully knowable because He is the Supreme Infinite Who is eternally ever new, limitlessly satiating, and infinitely glorious, and hence, ever unfathomable.¹¹⁸ There are several important areas where this study, for the first time, makes an original contribution to the Vedic tradition of *Pramāṇamīmāṃsā*. The next section presents the uniqueness of the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana’s perspective on some famous *pramāṇas*. A considerable amount of literature has been published on various *Pramāṇas* in Indian philosophy, but here we are going to analyze some significant factors of Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana regarding epistemology, for attaining knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.

4.4.1 Perception

Perception (*pratyakṣa*) is the means of knowledge that is accepted by every school of philosophy in India. This is the first source of knowledge that we have to take into account here. It is knowledge obtained by the exercise of our sense organs, the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the skin. Each sense organ is suited to cognize or to catch mainly one kind of sense impression or sensation. The sense-objects are sound (*śabda*), touch (*sparsa*), color (*rūpa*), taste (*rasa*), and smell

¹¹⁷ Kaṭha Upaniṣad -6/12

¹¹⁸ Vac. Kar. 1; BSSB 1/1/1, pp. 10-11

(*gandha*), grasped by the ear (*śrotra*), the skin (*tvak*), the eye (*cakṣu*) the tongue (*rasanā*), and the nose (*gandha*), respectively.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains the system of perception that how the *indriyas* get attached to their respective objects of pleasure by giving an example of a devotee. He elaborates: ā “For a *bhakta* (devotee) of Parabrahman, listening to the spiritual discourses of Parabrahman is the only subject (goal to connect) for his ears; touching the holy feet of Parabrahman or touching the holy dust from the feet of the *Sādhu* is the only subject for his skin; doing *darśana* of Parabrahman or the *Sādhu* is the only subject for his eyes; taking the *prasāda* of Parabrahman and singing His praises are the only subject for his tongue; and smelling the flowers and other objects which have been offered to Parabrahman is the only subject for his nose.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/32, p.83)

Svāminārāyaṇa explicitly explains that each of the five *gnan-indriya* and the five *karma indriya* have total knowledge of their respective subject. Furthermore, both an enlightened person and an unenlightened person behave in the same manner through their *indriyas*; the *indriyas* of the enlightened do not behave in a different manner from those of the unenlightened. It means that they connect first to the objects and provide knowledge to the *jivas*.¹¹⁹ Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa speaks of perception as the first *pramāṇa*. However, he explains it into his unique style in the *Vacanāmṛta*. For example, according to Svāminārāyaṇa, only when one sees with one’s eyes does one come to know that milk is white; only when one smells with one’s nose does one come to know its smell; only when one touches it with one’s finger does one come to know whether it is hot or cold; only when one tastes it with one’s tongue does one come to know its taste. In this manner, only when milk is tested through all of the senses can one totally know its nature; it cannot be totally

¹¹⁹ Vac. Var. 17

known through one sense alone ultimately to have such knowledge is called total *jnāna*.¹²⁰ The Bhāṣyakāra explores perception by explaining the instruments of it:

आत्माऽन्तःकरणाऽऽद्यं स्यात् प्रमाणं चक्षुरादिकम्।

विषयग्राहकाणि स्युरिन्द्रियाणि स्ववृत्तिभिः ॥¹²¹

“In perception, the means are as follows; the internal sense organs, external sense organs, and atman. They are all receivers of sense objects through their *vṛtti* (flow).” He goes further that perceptual knowledge could be external or internal. When the sense organs like eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue come in contact with external objects of the world. We have external perceptual knowledge. When the self perceives the ideas and emotions arising in the mind, it is internal perception. The *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta explains this point with an apt example. Suppose milk be sense perceptions; what happens? With my eyes, I see its white color; and through the nose, I perceive it as having pleasant smell typical to it; and though touch skin I perceive it as a liquid that is hot or cold; and when I perceive it with my tongue I experience its taste. The example chosen here points out that

1. Every *ātman* possesses knowledge, no absolute zero knowledge remains in the *ātman*.¹²²
2. Every perception apprehends things along with its qualities and determination;
3. In order to have valid *pratyakṣa* knowledge, one should attempt to apprehend reality with the help of as many sense organs (coordinately) as possible and necessary, because it helps in avoiding incompletes and error in perceptual judgment; and
4. The knowledge acquired through coordination of as many senses (including mind) and *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) is subject to lead to perfectness.

¹²⁰ Vac. Var. 2

¹²¹ SSSK 244

¹²² SSS. p.148

Because the knowledge of reality turns out to be *yathārtha* (as it actually is), and it leads to *pravṛtti sāmānyā*, i.e., having practical utility leading to successful activity or workability. In other words, the valid knowledge corresponds with reality and is conducive to life or is in consonance with experience.

Thus, knowledge and action are mutually complementary and confirmatory. In short, the concept of ‘*pramāṇa samplava* or coordination of instruments of knowing is involved in a knowledge situation (*jñāna prakriyā*). We now discuss the errors of acquiring complete knowledge. To shed light on it, *Svāminārāyaṇa* also offers a contrasting example in the *Vacanāmṛta*. First, we analyze the example of the *Vacanāmṛta*: if a person enters a dark chamber where there are pillars and *koṭhīs* (large earthen pitchers for storing grains), etc. he perceives and knows them only through his sense of touch. Based on this experience, he forsakes a hypothesis. But this is not complete knowledge because, in the absence of light, he has failed to perceive other qualities and characteristics and allied details relating to the objects. Therefore, the knowledge in such cases either remains incomplete or may involve errors of misapprehension due to non-apprehension; and hence, the knowledge is not *yathārtha*.¹²³

Here, the *Vacanāmṛta* emphasizes complete and perfect knowledge. The example cited here by *Svāminārāyaṇa* is intended to state that such knowledge is to be treated as incomplete and inadequate, as it lacks the important criterion of *yathārtha*. *Svāminārāyaṇa* further says that mere apprehension, in perception, say of a tail, or a face, or a hoof or udders alone of a cow is no doubt the knowledge of a cow, but not complete, adequate and authentic knowledge.¹²⁴ Therefore, in order to be valid, the knowledge must be ‘*yathārtha*’. *Svāminārāyaṇa* accepts here the

¹²³ Vac. Loya 7

¹²⁴ Vac. Loya 15

pratyakṣa pramāṇa as described above.¹²⁵ Moreover, the *pratyakṣa* of the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta can give the knowledge of Parabrahman or Akṣarabrahman because according to Him the Supreme Reality is always present on the earth in human form, either He Himself incarnates or He comes as the Parabrahman-realized Sādhū. When an aspirant, with the help of scriptures, knows him to be so, then he becomes a true devotee. Thus, the manifest form of Parabrahman always remains in front of our eyes.¹²⁶ Parabrahman then divinizes his cognitive and conative senses. So, a devotee gets correct knowledge of Parabrahman, himself, and the world. Such transcendental knowledge of Parabrahman is available to all selves, both embodied and disembodied. No release can be attained without the transcendental knowledge of Parabrahman, which is beyond the comprehension of finite human apparatuses like the senses, mind, intellect, etc. Hence, there has to be room for the acquisition of such knowledge, if not by self-effort, then at least through Parabrahman's grace. That alone will make the supreme goal accomplishable and the spiritual endeavor meaningful.

3.4.1.1 The Divine Sight

Generally, for valid perception, both the sense organs, external and internal, including *antaḥkaraṇa*, must be sound, free from defects, receptive, and alert. The self also must be completely involved in the process then, only perception will result in firm, resolute and complete knowledge. This might be found easily in the case of worldly objects but for the ultimate reality, the situation differs. *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* provides a general basis, which would ensure the possibility of acquiring correct knowledge. They search for certainty, thus seeking and securing the firm and sure foundation for knowledge. Here a critical problem erects - How can we believe person's capability of knowing reality an especially Divine Reality, Parabrahman

¹²⁵ Vac. Var. 19

¹²⁶ BGSB 4/34, pp. 109-110

with the perishable sense organs like eyes, etc. Svāminārāyaṇa illustrates the answer:

“Kṛṣṇā on the battlefield tells Arjuna: ‘*Pashya me Parth rupani shatsho tha sahstrani*’ There, he displayed countless realms and revealed the characteristics of Puruṣottama.” (Vac. Panch. 6, p. 375) By the immense grace of Parabrahman, Arjuna was able to gain knowledge of Parabrahman’s form. On this point, the Bhāṣyakāra highlights the means of knowledge which Kṛṣṇā describes as an *alaukika* sight, the divine sight in the *Gītā*.¹²⁷ The paramount disparity between empirical perceptual knowledge and divine perceptual knowledge is that the latter is not governed by logical principles, like *vyāpti* (invariable relation) and others, do not apply to the divine -perception. The sum and substance of the whole discussion are the transcendental Parabrahman (reality), which is knowable by His own divine sight given to us.

Knowledge is understood as definite, doubt-free, truthful, awareness of a thing episode or concept, especially about the true nature of ontological realities i.e., Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *māyā*, *īśvaras*, and *jīvas*. Only by the profound grace of Parabrahman, one can perceive those eternal entities. The Bhāṣyakāra explains while commenting on a *śloka* from the *Gītā*:

न तु मां शक्यसे द्रष्टुमनेनैव स्वचक्षुषा ।

दिव्यं ददामि ते चक्षुः पश्य मे योगमैश्वरम् ॥¹²⁸

“You are not able to see me with your physical eye; therefore, I give you the divine eye to see my majestic power and glory.” The SB explains: “लौकिकचर्मचक्षुषा माम् अलौकिकं दिव्यं पुरुषोत्तमं द्रष्टुं तु न शक्यसे समर्थो नैव भवसि। अतोऽहं ते तुभ्यं दिव्यम् अलौकिकं दिव्यदर्शनमा चक्षुः दृष्टिं ददामि तेन मे मम ऐश्वरं योगं महैश्वर्यमयं विश्वदर्शनयोगं पश्य मत्कृपया निभालय॥” (BGSB 11/8, p. 242) Kṛṣṇā said: “O Arjuna, you are unable to see my divine Puruṣottama form with your *māyic* eyes so

¹²⁷ Vac. Loya 7, 8; Kar. 8

¹²⁸ BG 11/8

I bestow you the divine eyes so behold my hundreds and thousands of multifarious divine forms of different colors and shapes. Through my grace, behold all the celestial beings and many wonders never seen before. Also, behold the entire creation – animate, inanimate, and whatever else you would like to see – all at one place in my body.” There is no other system to know Parabrahman before experiencing Him. Faith in Parabrahman stands on the unsteady ground without a psychic vision of the object of devotion. All our spiritual discipline is focused on this vision.

The vision is fundamental to overcome the last bit of emotional impurity and any lingering doubt in the mind of the seeker because, to a human mind, seeing is believing. Therefore, Arjuna, like any other devotee, longs to see the transcendental form of the Lord. *Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* explains this while commenting on the *mantra*: Parabrahman is subtler than the subtle, more significant than the great; It dwells in the heart of each living being. “तमक्रतुः पश्यति वीतशोको धातुप्रसादान्महिमानमात्मनः” (KU 2/20) “He who is free from desire and free from grief, with mind and senses tranquil, then by the grace of Parabrahman beholds the glory of the Ātman and Paramātman.” “तम् अणीयस्त्वमहीयस्त्वादिरूपेणोक्तं सर्वव्यापकत्वसर्वनियामकत्वादिरूपम् आत्मनः परमात्मनः महिमानम् ऐश्वर्यं माहात्म्यं वा धातुः सर्वधारकस्य परमात्मन एव प्रसादात् कृपया अक्रतुः सकामकर्मानासक्तः पश्यति साक्षात्करोति । वीतशोकः च भवतीति” ॥ (KUSB 2/20, p.117)

“Although this Parabrahman dwells in the heart of every living being, yet ordinary mortals do not perceive it because of its subtlety. It cannot be perceived by the senses; a finer spiritual sight is required. Thus, when the whole being becomes calm and serene, thereafter by His grace, it is possible to perceive that effulgent Parabrahman and His power, glory, and substantives nature. As a result, he or she becomes free from sorrow.” Moreover, after acquiring this divine sight, the aspirant’s heart must be uncontaminated and freed from every impure desire; the

thought must be indrawn from all external objects; the mind and body must be under constraint; Parabrahman is subtler than the subtle because He is the invisible essence of everything; and He is greater than the great because He is unlimited, sustaining power of the whole universe; that upon which all existence rests.

3.4.1.2 Imperceptible Became Perceptible

A plaintiff accuses that Parabrahman is mentioned in *Śrutis* as inconceivable, imperceptible, and invisible. Thus, how can one become able to know or perceive Him? At this point, an appealing debate occurs in the BSSB-1/1/1. The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates it with perfect argumentation and using a set of references.¹²⁹ Texts which teach that Brahman¹³⁰ is without qualities teach that it is free from all evil qualities.

Similarly, other texts declare that having a form is his essential nature. It is the Brahman that is to be beheld; it is the Brahma that is to be known; it is the Brahman that is to be searched for; it is the Brahman which is to be heard about; it is the Brahman which is to be thought in mind; it is the Brahman which is to be meditated upon. There is nothing else worthwhile thinking, nothing else worthwhile possessing because Brahman and Parabrahman are the highest supreme entities to attain. If we don't understand Brahman as a knowable entity then the *Śrutis* that insist that Brahman is perceptible and knowable must object.¹³¹ This means of knowledge is also explored at various places in the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa*

¹²⁹ “ननु एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यदृष्टं द्रष्टृश्रुतं श्रोत्रमतं मन्त्रविज्ञानं विज्ञातृ” ब्र.३/८/११(, ‘परा यया तदक्षरमधिगम्यते । यत्तदद्रेश्यमग्राह्यम्’ मु.१/१/५,६ (इति, तथा च यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह) तै.२/४/१, तै.२/९/१(, ‘न तत्र चक्षुर्गच्छति न वाग् गच्छति नौ मनः’) के.१/३ (/इत्यादावक्षरब्रह्मणः परब्रह्मणश्च वाङ्मनआद्यविषयत्वश्रवणाद् व्यर्थ एव तद्विशेषविज्ञानप्रयोजनकोऽयं शास्त्रारम्भश्रम इति चेद्, अनधिगतश्रुत्यर्थस्याऽयं व्यर्थ आक्षेपश्रमः । यतोऽनासन्नब्रह्मस्वरूपसमाश्रयणस्याऽत एवाऽनासाऽक्षरब्रह्मसाधर्म्यस्य परमात्मसहजानन्दपरमोपासनहीनस्य लौकिकविषयैषिणो जीवेश्वरसमुदायस्यैव तत्प्राकृतचक्षुर्मानसादीन्द्रियाऽविषयतायास्तत्रोपदेशाद् । अन्यथा ब्रह्मविदानेति परम्) तै.२/१/१(, ‘य एतदक्षरं गार्गि विदित्वाऽस्माल्लोकात्त्रैति स ब्राह्मणः’) बृ.३/८/१०(, ‘एतद्ध्येवाऽक्षरं ज्ञात्वा यो यदिच्छति तस्य तत्’) कठ.२/१६(, ‘अक्षरं वेदयते यस्तु’) प्र.४/१०,११(, ‘तदेतदक्षरं ब्रह्म, तदेतत् सत्यं तदेतदमृतं तद् वेदव्यं सोम्य विद्धि’) मु.२/२/२(, ‘ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति’) मु.३/२/९ (इत्यादीनामक्षरब्रह्मज्ञानविषयताप्रबोधिनीनां, ‘तं वेदं पुरुषं वेद’) प्र.६/६(, ‘य एतदेवं विद्वान्’) छा.१/९/२(, ‘दृश्यते त्वग्रया बुद्ध्या सूक्ष्मया सूक्ष्मदर्शिभिः’) कठ.५/१३(, ‘अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं मत्वा’) कठ.२/१२(, ‘तं पश्यति निष्कलं ध्यायमानः’) मु.३/१/८((यत्ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यति) ई.१६(, ‘भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थिरिच्छन्ते सर्वसंशयः । क्षीयन्ते चास्य कर्माणि तस्मिन् दृष्टे परावरे’) मु.२/२/८(, ‘आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः’) बृ.२/४/५, बृ.४/५/६ (इत्यादीनामक्षराधिपतेर्ज्ञानविषयतावाचिनीनां च भगवतीश्रुतीनाम् उपदेशवैयर्थ्यं तद्विरोधी वा स्यात् ।”

¹³⁰ In this context Brhman refers for both Brhman and Parabrahman.

¹³¹ BSSB 1/1/1, pp. 11-12

Bhāṣya: ‘In the congregation of living entities, he sees the highest of the high and the person is hidden in the persons’(PU 5/5), ‘When the seer sees the brilliant maker and lord (of the world)’(MU 3/1/3), ‘A yogī who is in union with the supreme seeing every being with an equal eye’(BG 6/29), One, who sees Me everywhere and in everything (BG 6/29)etc.

The findings of the current study have a different perspective than the other Indian schools of philosophies. As far as perception is concerned, the Bhāṣyakāra is providing a novel contribution to the *Vedāntic* tradition. He emphasizes the grace of Parabrahman than our *māyic* senses. To conclude this section, in the analysis of the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa* literature, we observe that, in order to classify perception, the Bhāṣyakāra also goes into full details.¹³²

4.4.2 Inference

Bhadreśadāsa defines inference as:

अनु हेतुमिति नित्यं साध्यस्य जायते मितिः।

तस्मादनुमितिः प्रोक्ता प्रमाणस्थाऽनुमानजा ॥¹³³

“Always after the knowledge of reason, *sādhya* is proved. So, the reason or sign is called inference, it is one of the *pramāṇas* and the knowledge which is attained from it is called inferred knowledge or *anumiti*.” The knowledge by inference differs from the knowledge by perception because it is mediate and indirect. The knowledge by inference depends on the perception of the relation of *vyāpti*. The

¹³² प्रत्यक्षं द्विविधं ज्ञेयं लौकिकं च ह्यलौकिकम्।
आद्यमिन्द्रियसापेक्षं बद्धजीवेश्वरात्मनाम् ॥२३६॥
इन्द्रियनिरपेक्षं स्याद् मुक्तानां योगिनां तथा।
द्वितीयं तत् कृपालब्धमक्षरपरमात्मनोः ॥२३७॥
सापेक्षं द्विविधं ज्ञेयं बाह्यमाभ्यन्तरं तथा।
समनश्चक्षुरादीनां बाह्यं विषयसंगतः ॥ २३८॥
बाह्येन्द्रियाऽनपेक्षं यदन्तः स्मृत्यादि मानसम्।
षड्विधकारणाऽपेक्षं तदपि षड्विधं भवेत् ॥२३९॥
संस्कारमात्रजन्यं यज्ज्ञानं स्मरणमुच्यते।
विषयो नाऽगृहीतोऽत्र गृहीतग्राहिका स्मृतिः ॥२४०॥

¹³³ SSSK 245

knowledge by verbal testimony also is indirect. Svāminārāyaṇa accepts reason but rejects bare rationalism which dwindles *śraddhā* (faith) and spiritual aspirantship (*mumukṣutvam*). Svāminārāyaṇa accepts knowledge by inference and holds, that knowledge also has credibility. It is clearly suggested in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Svāminārāyaṇa illustrates: “That *jīva* appears to be in one place; it appears to be as fine as the tip of a spear; it appears to be exceptionally subtle. It appears so because it is concomitant with the *buddhi*. But when that *jīva* is known as the illuminator of the body, *indriya* and *antahakarana*, their presiding deities and the subjects, it appears to be very vast, and it appears to be pervasive. That is when it is not associated with the *buddhi*. That *jīva* is known not by the *indriyas*, but by inference. For example, on seeing a sword weighing 200 kg, a person can infer, ‘the wielder of this sword must be powerful.’ Similarly, the *jīva* inspires the body, *indriyas*, etc., simultaneously; therefore, it must be mighty. This is how the *jīva* can be known by inference.”(Vac. Kar.1, p. 249)

In the domain of knowledge by sense-perception, reason can help correct distortions and errors; but cannot eliminate the basic facts that cause such distortions or errors. The imitation of knowledge by inference is indicated in *Vacanāmṛta* that one experiences things only by inference and does not actually see it, then he cannot be said to possess perfect *jnāna*. Nevertheless, because he has such a firm conviction, he indeed must have experienced some sort of transcendental powers of Parabrahman in the past; if not, he will experience them in the future.¹³⁴

3.4.2.1 Importance of Inference

Svāminārāyaṇa is a protagonist both of intellect and intuition, for he always showed his love for intelligent seekers and rated the Parabrahman given intuitive realization of truth as the being highest and veritable. He mentions, “This fact can only be

¹³⁴ Vac. Loyā, 7

understood by one who has a sharp intelligence and a craving for higher happiness; therefore, I like them who has such intelligence.” (Vac. Pan-1, p. 353) This means that intuition by itself cannot yield the right knowledge of Parabrahman unless it is blessed by Parabrahman. Publications that concentrate on inference or logic is more frequently adopted in a historical or chronological approach of debate in philosophy. Even in modern times, when rationalism has prevailed everywhere, the logical approach became more significant. The Bhāṣyakāra explicitly demonstrates his perspective on inference and logic. Since being an expert logician, he used a superb variety of logic in the *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* to refute the opposition: for example in the BS युक्तेः-1/1/18, रत्नाननुपत्यधिकरणम्-2/2/1-2/2/10; CU 6/2/3; KU 1/21, 22; MU 2/2/1; TU 2/7/2; BU 3/9/28. However, he never extolled the way of logic and argumentation to realize the eternal entities. In his commentary, he discusses the subtle line between verbal testimony and inference.

3.4.2.2 The Limitations

Svāminārāyaṇa draws our attention in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “In this way, through these two philosophies, the nature of Parabrahman was realized by inference. However, is that Parabrahman black or yellow? Is He tall or short? Does He possess a form, or is He formless? That was not realized.” (Vac. Var. 2, pp. 533-534) The Bhāṣyakāra also mentions the limitations of the logic:

प्रमाणं नैव तर्कः स्यात् तत्राऽनुग्राहकस्तु सः।

व्यभिचारादिशङ्कानां वारणं तदनुग्रहः ॥¹³⁵

“Logic, which is the uttermost part of inference, is actually not considered a means to knowledge, but it helps attain true knowledge of the ultimate realities. Moreover, it is gracious to eradicate the controversy and doubt regarding the ultimate knowledge.” Inference or reason relies on perception and hence has its own limitation. Reason also is limited by the limits of human experience and one’s

¹³⁵ SSSK - 249

ability and insight to go beyond it. How sharp and deep one is able to see correlation and consequences and logical implications determines the success and credibility in the knowledge by reason. Since knowledge by inference reason also is susceptible to errors, and on account of its dependence on perception, it cannot become a sure guide to the knowledge of Parabrahman. Inference or reason also fails to comprehend Parabrahman and his essential nature, because the basis of inference lies in perception or relationship between sign/mark (*liṃga*) and the bearer of the sign, i.e., the perception of the invariable relationship of concomitance and/or succession between the *hetu* (reason) and the predicate (*sādhya*). Thus, the perceptual apprehension, and based on that, the application of universal relation between the two make the inference possible.

Every inference involves subject-object relation. It also suggests the qualified nature on knowable objects. Inference depends on the discriminating activity of the knowing mind. However, the discriminating intellect also has its own limitations. In inference, our reasoning self (intellect) has to function according to the laws of thought and the evidence available to him through perception and verbal testimony. The *Śvetāśvetara Upaniṣad* says: ‘नैव च तस्य लिङ्गम्’ (श्वे.उप.-६/९) “Neither His actions nor His organs of action are visible by *māyic indriyas*. There is nothing that can be seen which is better than or equal to him. His supreme powers are heard to be numerous. By His own inherent nature, His knowledge and energy work. There is not even a single sign (*lingam*) of Him by which He can be inferred.”

Therefore, its content and conclusion are always linked with what is empirically perceived. It does not rise above significantly. The sharpness of intelligence and ability of the mind to see a correlation, the necessity to apply *vyāpti* and infer based on them, are the logical and psychological requirements in knowledge by inference. Parabrahman is not inferable, because as per rules of logic, every inference is based on invariable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between reason and the middle term.

Exceedingly, all the philosophical arguments based on design and cosmological arguments based on the idea of a series of causes are mostly based on comparisons and similarities observed to exist in the created universe. Usually, they all are analogical arguments. All such arguments presented to prove the existence of Parabrahman are, in fact, not conclusive. They are probabilistic in character. They at the most suggest the possibility of an entity or a substance that may be existing. Parabrahman is the existence of all existences. He is the existence per se. So, Parabrahman is not an object of proof, and instead, he is beyond proof.

He is the omni-immanent, omni-causal, omni-potent, transcendent being, He is the existence of all existences, the being of all beings, and the supreme personality who is the basis of all proofs. Moreover, all arguments are based on inference or hypothesis, which cannot conclusively say anything of the nature and personality of Parabrahman. Along with this, as all proofs for the existence of Parabrahman are founded on his existence, it sounds childish to make attempts to prove his existence. Inference or Reason (*tarka*) collapses when it attempts to explain the world or the realm of transcendental reality without positing Parabrahman in its center. It also falls when it tries to prove the existence of Parabrahman on the basis of pure reason. No analogical inference nor any hypothetic-deductive argument can ever determine the existence of Parabrahman. Reason is like a double-edged sword. It cuts both ways, and every reason can be refuted by better reason. It can prove or disprove an argument. But, it can neither prove nor disprove Parabrahman's existence. Therefore, in such matters, as *Mimāṃsā* suggests, revelation is the best guide. The *Mimāṃsā* directive, namely- *aprāpte hi śāstram arthavat*, suggests that what can neither be proved nor disproved by other *pramāṇa* (means of knowledge) becomes the domain of radiance from revelation. The incompetence of perception and reason to establish the supersensuous truth leads us to realize the need and importance of revelations as a valid source of knowledge.

3.4.2.3 Logic is not Everything

The Bhāṣyakāra's qualitative analysis in that area provides detailed exegetical phenomena. In the context of *Brahmasūtra*-2/1/11¹³⁶, his compass of vision reflects the entire building of Svāminārāyaṇa's philosophy as far as epistemology is concerned: “अथाप्यत्र तर्को विशेषो विचार्यः । तार्किकपुरुषकालस्थलादिभेदेनापि तर्काणां स्वोत्कृष्टतर्कविशेषेण दूष्यत्वं प्रेक्षावतां प्रतीतिसिद्धमेवेति न ते शाश्वतसिद्धान्ते प्रमाणपदवीमुत्सहन्ते । समानपुरुषोत्थापिततर्का अपि कालभेदेन तत्तदिष्य विमर्शप्रकर्षादिना तत्पुरुषोत्थापितेन स्वोत्तरकालीनतर्कविशेषेण खल हन्यमाना दृश्यन्ते। किञ्च तर्को हि बुद्धिधर्मः। तस्याश्चाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमादिदिव्यतत्त्वेभ्यः कनिष्ठत्वं चात्रैवोत्तरत्र वक्ष्यते। ” (BSSB 2/1/11, pp.165-166). “We should now ponder upon the nature of logic. Logic used by any logician cannot be venerated as an ultimate truth because due to time, place, and the changing nature of a human, it also changes. Even when a logician proves something according to his logic, tomorrow, he may find another logic that can refute his own logic. Actually, logic is an attribute of intellect, which is *māyic* and far lower than Akṣara and Puruṣottama.”

In his extensive commentary on BS-2/1/11, the Bhāṣyakāra strongly refutes the logic in the way to realize Parabrahman. पुरुषधीवैचित्र्यात् तर्का विनष्टप्रतिष्ठा मिथोव्याघातकाश्चोपलभ्यन्ते। (BSSB 2/1/11, pp. 165-166) “Due to the unstable nature of the *buddhi* of a human, logic not only lost its splendor, but every new logic always goes against the first one, this leads to disaster in any established principle based on logic.” He further defends the primacy of verbal testimony and inductive expression. In particular, he argues in some detail about the limits and defects of rational induction when employed independently of scripture to prove Brahman's creatorship. He firstly draws upon the basic reasoning used by the *Nyāya* school of Indian logic to deduce such creatorship. Their syllogism takes the form: All effects have an agent; the world (comprising of sprouts, etc.) is an effect; therefore, it must have an agent. The Bhāṣyakāra then analytically dismantles each technical constituent of the argument

¹³⁶ तर्काप्रतिष्ठानादपि अन्यथानुमेयमिति चेदेवमप्यनिर्माक्षप्रसङ्गः ॥ 2/1/11॥

and rejoins a series of counterarguments before issuing a warning: an overenthusiastic application of reasoning or confidence in one's intellect can blind one from seeing one's own limitation of fallacious argumentation, leaving one empty of higher, more subtle truths.

The Bhāṣyakāra adds that adeptness in argumentation alone is inadequate, simply because the divine, not-this-worldly, and sensorially imperceptible Parabrahman can never become the subject of reason alone – just as the ears can never grasp the visual beauty of a rose and the eyes fail to apprehend the sweet classical music. Besides, all instances of inference are predicated on perception, and the senses' limitations have already been well-founded. In this sequence, the *Katha Upaniṣad*, for example, amenably states that the highest knowledge is beyond suppositional reasoning (*atarkyam*)' (2/8) and thus not fully comprehensible by the intellect alone. The very next verse begins:

“नैषा तर्केण मतिरापनेया” (KUSB 2/9) इति”

“Nor can this knowledge be grasped by argumentation.” As the Bhāṣyakāra affords some extra elaboration on this topic, he once more alerts that reasoning left to its own devices can be dangerous because, after all, argumentation is a skill. A strong argument can always be ruined by a stronger argument. So, there is no telling which incisive piece of logic might be superseded by a yet more rational objector or by the same thinker at a different time or place. Such contestations and disputes are endless and ultimately meaningless, he asserts, for this is not the way to decide or judge established principles (*siddhānta*). Besides, the reasoning is designated as a quality of the intellect (*buddhi*), which the *Katha Upaniṣad* later concedes is inferior to the self, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman (KU 3/10-11).

Thus, it is useless if not perilous and ridiculously arrogant venture to attempt to grasp the knowledge of a supremely divine entity by that which is still fettered by *māyā*. In conclusion, the Bhāṣyakāra asks: how can there be any other reliable

means of knowing that which is not fully perceptible to human senses and graspable by human intellect? Therefore, rather than perception or inference, divinely spoken or divinely inspired words constituting scripture are reliable sources to form an accurate understanding of Parabrahman. Among all the sources of knowledge, scripture (text) is thus the principal knowledge-source (*paramapramāṇa*) and Parabrahman is, simply, understandable by scripture alone (*śāstraikagamyā*).¹³⁷ However, while the above places reasoned argumentation in its proper epistemological position, it need not be totally abandoned in order to defer to scriptural authority. In the same comment on KU-2/9, the Bhāṣyakāra makes the decisive difference between correct reasoning (*sattarka*) and incorrect reasoning (*dustarka*):

1. "ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरूपदिष्टसच्छास्त्रसिद्धान्तवचनानुगुणस्तर्कः सत्तर्कः "
2. "दुस्तर्कस्तु तद्विपरीतः कुबुद्धिल्यतो गुरूपदिष्टशास्त्रसिद्धान्तवचनानुगुण उच्छृङ्खलः प्रमाणाननुग्राहकः."

The former is that which is informed by and undergirded by *śraddhā*, which he describes in BSSB-2/1/11. Second, as paramount faith in the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru and the *śāstra* and *siddhānta*. Conversely, incorrect reasoning is that which is uncommitted to and independent of scripture and Guru. Reason alone may be blind, but associated with faith, it is able to explore the broad contours of philosophical and spiritual reflection reliably. Faith gives it direction, leading to fruitful culmination.

Thus, reason, can be counted as a valuable tool in understanding revelation when properly grounded in and guided by scripture and the Guru. It is not necessarily good in discovering new ideas brings loss in the principles. For there always be traced to revelation but exploring those ideas excavating from them deeper truths that had been a severe loss for centuries. This is what is meant by reason, providing

¹³⁷ BSSB 1/1/3, pp. 22-24

insight as it opens one to fresh, deeper, richer understandings of revelation. As said in the *Siddhānta Śuddha*: तत्राऽनुग्राहकस्तु सः।¹³⁸

Obviously, to confirm and consolidate what has already been learned from the scripture and to refute claims contradictory to it, reason can help undoubtedly. Early on, in the *Brahmasūtra-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya*, an objection is raised about the inquiry into 'Brahman'. The question is this: if *śāstra* (scripture) is the supreme authority of *Brāhmic* knowledge, it is futile, then, to debate upon it because now there is no room for doubt and therefore there are no doubts to dispel.

The Bhāṣyakāra discards that idea, asserting realistically that doubts are dispelled; it is useful and even necessary to test and necessary to test and consolidate what one knows, just as one shakes a peg that has been freshly hammered into the ground.¹³⁹ Being the *tarkaprasthana*, the *Brahmasūtra* testifies the faithful employment of reasoned argumentation to harmonize meanings, clarify ambiguous content, refute contradictory interpretations and rebut objections. Reason thus serves to strengthen and simplify that which has already been established by scripture. This is all to defend and embolden faith. The Bhāṣyakāra too defends his interpretations in the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* as being *Śrutiyuktisammatā*, that is, in agreement with both revelation and reasoning: Ratiocination is still permissible and profitable when deployed on the basis of scripture. Therefore, applying reasoned reflection is not in contradistinction to the concept of *Śrutiyuktisammatā*, insofar as it is in consonance with and submission to revelation. Indeed, reason often works in the service of revelation, bolstering its authority and justifying its precedence.¹⁴⁰ In the same way, this all debate and enunciation, the Bhāṣyakāra elaborates in the BS-1/1/3 and KU-2/9 as well.

¹³⁸ SSSK 249

¹³⁹ BSSB 1/1/1, p.11

¹⁴⁰ SSSK, pp. 153-154

4.4.3 Verbal Testimony

4.4.3.1 Significance of Verbal Testimony

We are indeed very grateful that an immense treasury of the ancient scriptures is found even today. From the Vedas to the Vacanāmṛta, all sacred texts' availability is the great fortune of the entire humanity. This accumulation of the text is the foundation of spirituality and philosophy. A long process of interpretation of these scriptures has molded our life; even modern India is nothing but the reflection of the scriptures. Therefore, we are highly indebted to the scriptures, not because they are the ancient treasure of knowledge, but due to their liveliness which has become the way of life in our nation.

No doubt, the modern world has become the ocean of knowledge but the knowledge of worldly science, art, and commerce is based on the use of reason and empirical evidence determined by sense perception and logical-mathematical applications. However, such worldly knowledge is just an insignificant fragment of the total edifice knowledge. The use of reason and intellect is held in high esteem, but rationalism and intellectualism are not the topmost steps in the ladder of true knowledge. They occupy their rightful place in the initial rungs to reach higher heights; because there are areas transcending the sensuous and the rational applications and accomplishments. The realities, namely atman (*jīveśvarās*), Brahman, and Parabrahman, are supra sensuous and supra-rational. Through *śabda* (testimony) and graciously Parabrahman given vision, one can have access to reality. A Sanskrit verse that reads:

अनेकसंशयोच्छेदि परोक्षार्थस्य दर्शकम् ।

सर्वस्य लोचनं शास्त्रं यस्य नास्त्यन्ध एव सः॥¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Upaniṣad Marma introduction, p.1

“Scriptures dispel several doubts and reveal intangible truths (literally make visible that which is beyond the eyes). Scriptures are the eyes of all. Without them, a person is indeed blind.” While commenting on the *Brahmasūtra Śāstrayonītavata*, the Bhāṣyakāra declares that “जगज्जन्मादिकारणे अक्षरब्रह्मपरब्रह्मणी शस्त्रप्रमाणमूलकत्वात्सिध्यते” (BSSB 1/1/3, p.17) “When we inquire the cause, sustainer, and dissolver of this universe, only scriptures can reveal the truth that above-mentioned qualities are of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.” Then immediately he adds “शास्त्रमेव भवति तत्र प्रमुखप्रमाणमित्यर्थः” (BSSB 1/1/3, p.17) that among all other *pramāṇas* “verbal testimony is prominent.”¹⁴² Why does verbal testimony play a vital role in order to understand the form of Brahman and Parabrahman and the firm conviction of them? Svāminārāyaṇa answers that the knowledge of Parabrahman and his essential nature, qualities, traits, sports, exploits, etc. are described as they actually are.

The *Vacanāmṛta* explores: “In the scriptures, there are an infinite multiplicity of talks describing Parabrahman as being powerful as well as weak, as being the all-doer as well as a non-doer, etc. So then, which action not mentioned in the scriptures could Parabrahman perhaps have performed that one loses one’s faith?” (Vac. Sar. 13, p.231) In this manner, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School accepts the verbal testimony as a more significant tool as far as attaining knowledge of the ultimate reality is concerned.

3.4.3.2 The Vedic Texts

According to the unanimous opinion of ancient sages of India, including the authors of the six systems of philosophy known as the *Darśana Śāstras*, the Vedas were revealed by Parabrahman at the beginning of the human creation. The meaning of the word ‘Veda’ is knowledge. It is derived from the root form~ (*vid*) to know. By Veda, we mean the knowledge given by the omnipotent and omniscient Lord of the

¹⁴² प्रत्यक्षादिप्रमाणेषु शब्दस्तु प्रमुखो भवेत्। यस्मादलौकिकाऽर्थेषु शब्दाऽन्यप्रसरो न हि ॥SSSK 268॥

universe at the commencement of the human creation for the harmonious development and guidance of mankind; As worldly parents give knowledge to their children for their welfare, so Parabrahman, who is our divine father and mother revealed the eternal truths through the Vedas for the well-being of all people. Parabrahman is within and without all beings and things. The sages' hearts were pure and receptive, and Parabrahman inspired them with knowledge. On account of His omnipresence and omnipotence, Parabrahman does not stand in need of paper, pen, or ink, nor does He stand in need of uttering words with a physical mouth like human beings. It was enough for Him to inwardly prompt the hearts of the sages in order to instill in them perfect knowledge. As pointed out at the very outset, the glory of the Vedas has been sung by all the *Dharmaśāstras* or *Smṛtis*.¹⁴³

Verbal testimony *śabda* could be either sacred or secular. The sacred word indicates the Vedic texts. The Vedas are self-evident, self-valid. They do not need the help of any other *pramāṇa* or the thing to prove their validity. They are authoritative in total. The Vedas are conveyed in the same form and order in every age, as they were in the previous periodical cycle (*kalpa*).¹⁴⁴

The Bhāṣyakāra iterates:

संहिताब्राह्मणरूपो यस्तथोपनिषदात्मकः ।

आरण्यकस्वरूपश्च वेदः प्रामाण्यभागे भवेत् ॥¹⁴⁵

“The Veda has four parts; *Samhitā*, Brahman, *Āraṇyaka*, and *Upaniṣads*, these all must be considered to be most authentic and the source of true knowledge.” He invariably explains in the *bhāṣyas* about the significance of the Vedic scriptures. For example, “सर्वे वेदा आमनन्ति”¹⁴⁶ “That goal which all the Vedas glorify, which all austerities proclaim, desiring which (people) practice *Brahmacarya*, that goal I tell thee briefly--it is Aum, Akṣarabrahman.” *Śabda* or scriptural testimony is viewed

¹⁴³ BSSB 1/3/28-1/3/30, pp. 113-115

¹⁴⁴ Vac. Sar. 6

¹⁴⁵ SSSK 256

¹⁴⁶ KUSB 2/15, p.99

as the only guide for the knowledge of Parabrahman, as the Vedas are *apauruṣeya*. They, therefore, are free from error and are definite.

Thus, one must acquire the resolute knowledge of Parabrahman through scriptures alone. The scriptures (*śabda*) are the best escort in the matters of the metaphysical knowledge of the ultimate. They take us beyond the limits of the other two *pramāṇa*, viz perception, and inference. They supply us all transcending comprehensive knowledge of Parabrahman. Their authority depends on the principle of *svataḥ prāmāṇyam*. In this way, the fundamental questions in philosophy and spiritual *sādhana* (endeavor), so far unanswered, get most convincingly answered by the verbal testimony. There is an element of Guru-guided compulsiveness in the spontaneous acceptance of this *pramāṇa*, for it has ideal perfectness, completeness, convincingness, coherence, self-evidence, pragmatic workability, and absence of contradiction.

3.4.3.3 The Most Authentic Scripture – The Vacanāmṛta

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, Svāminārāyaṇa is adored as the *Ācārya* of *Ācārya* and as the Lord of Lords¹⁴⁷ and hence, his words are accepted as the highest testimony (*ācārya vacanam param pramāṇam*). This has helped solve all disputes and settle the controversial philosophical issues in the *Vedāntaika* domain from *sāmpradāyika* standpoint. Bhadrēśadāsa claims: “साक्षाद्वेदो भवेद् वाक्यं स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः।¹⁴⁸ इदं हि साक्षात्परब्रह्मोपदेशसंग्रहरूपो वेद एव। अतः एव स्वतः प्रमाणम्।” (SSS, p.172) “Svāminārāyaṇa’s words are similar to the Vedas. The *Vacanāmṛta* scripture is a compilation of the words of Parabrahman. Therefore, self-evident.” When it comes to identifying the *Vacanāmṛta* as an authentic text, the Bhāṣyakāra verifies: “Among the *sāmpradāyika* scriptures the *Vacanāmṛta* holds the top priority, since it is the conglomerate of teachings of Parabrahman.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Vac. Gadh. 3/38

¹⁴⁸ SSSK 260

¹⁴⁹ संग्रदायशास्त्रेष्वपि साक्षात्परब्रह्मोपदेशसंग्रहत्वाद् वचनमृतानि स्वतः प्रमाणं परमं प्रमाणं च। इदं हि साक्षात्परब्रह्मोपदेशसंग्रहरूपो वेद एव। अत एव स्वतः प्रमाणम्। (SSS, p.172) परमकल्याणप्रदाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसिद्धान्तलक्षणब्रह्मविद्याप्रबोधकत्वात् सकलशास्त्रसिद्धान्तनिर्णायकत्वात् परोक्षतया वेदादिप्रबोधिताऽप्राकृतपदार्थानां प्रत्यक्षतया प्रबोधनप्रवणत्वात्

There is another cause why his teachings are accepted as the highest testimony. His dialogues reveal the credibility of his words. His convincing statements wear the stamp of certainty and authenticity. He declares that what he has spoken to the devotees is not born of rational speculation nor to show them how great he is. Svāminārāyaṇa proclaims: “I preach these discourses to you not out of any images of my mind, nor to display any sort of aptitude. I have experienced all that I have spoken about. In fact, I state in accordance to what I practice.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/39, p. 669) In the *Vacanāmṛta*, he invariably confirms that whatever he speaks in the assembly is the essence of the Vedas, *Purāṇas* and all the scriptures concerning the immense emancipation of self. He had pondered over all of them and drawn out its essence. It is the highest sacred lore, the quintessence, and the life-string for all those seekers who tread the path of attaining emancipation.¹⁵⁰

Again, the principles of the *Vacanāmṛta* are “the undebatable declaration of truth, the truth I am actually perceiving. It is what I have seen and realized in actual experience. It is in consonance, with scriptural evidence... it is the central theme of all scriptures and spiritual experience.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/13, p. 422) Thus, the doctrine of fivefold realities, body-soul relationship, the qualitative personal Parabrahman as the highest reality, etc., he arrives at, is based on his study of the Vedas, *Smṛtis*, *Purāṇas*, and other sacred texts and also philosophical reason backed by veridical intuitive experience. What is more important to remember regarding the *Vacanāmṛta* is its historical authenticity.¹⁵¹ Professor John Carmen states after reading the *Vacanāmṛta*: “In this book, however, every discourse is precisely dated.

प्रमाणराजः । वेदे वेदान्तमन्त्रे सकलपरतया , निश्चितं यत्परोक्षं, प्रत्यक्षं तच्च ब्रूते , सहजलभतया स्वामिनारायणं यद् । साक्षात् प्रोक्तं च तत्त्वं श्रुतिगहनगुहागर्भितं ब्रह्मसंज्ञं, तस्मात्प्रामाण्यपक्षे भजति परमतां सर्वशास्त्रेषु नित्यम् ॥ (SSS, p.173)

¹⁵⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

¹⁵¹ Gyanananddas Sādhu, Vachanamritani Visheshatao, Swaminārāyaṇa Aksharpith, Ahmedabad, 2019, p.8

This is a chapter of religious history which one might say is in the full light of day as far as our knowledge of history is concerned.”¹⁵²

3.4.3.4 A Tribute to Veda Vyāsa

Svāminārāyaṇa’s faith in the scriptures is clearly echoed when he paid tribute to Veda Vyāsa, the ādi ācārya. Vyāsa is revered as the Kṛṣṇā Dvaipāyana, the great ācārya. He arranged the mantras and codified the Vedas. He is the author of the Vedānta Sūtras, the Nyāya Prasthāna for the Vedānta. Svāminārāyaṇa says: “There is no ācārya (teacher) greater than Vyāsa and all other ācāryas have flourished their sampradāyas by following the words of Vyāsa. Thus, the words of Vyāsa have the highest testimony than the words of any other ācārya.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/10, p. 598). Further, He acknowledges that He has attentively listened to all of the scriptures which Vyāsajī has written regarding the attainment of liberation. He shall be convinced if one supports an argument by the words of Vyāsa, for He has firm faith in his words.¹⁵³ From the incalculable supply of scripture literature, eight are the most acceptable to Svāminārāyaṇa. Amongst them, all are of (Vedas are codified by him not authored) Vyāsajī except Yājñavalkya smṛti.¹⁵⁴ They are –

1. Vedas (all four Vedas) together with Upaniṣad.
2. The Vedānta sūtras are composed by Veda Vyāsa.
3. Śrīmadā Bhāgavatam
4. Viṣṇu Sahasranāmam from Anuśāśana parva of Mahābhārata
5. Bhagavad Gītā from Bhīṣma parva of Mahābhārata
6. Vidurniti
7. Śrī Vāsudeva Māhātmyam section of Viṣṇu Khaṇḍa from Skāṇḍa Purāṇa
8. Yājñavalkya Smṛti with Mitākṣarā notes and annotations.

¹⁵² Carmen John B., New Dimension in Vedānta Philosophy, South Asian Religious Study, University of Harvard, USA, p.207

¹⁵³ Vac. Gadh. 1/39, 2/21

¹⁵⁴ Vac. Var. 18

Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa put all three *Prasthānas* in his most favorable and acceptable list of scriptures. The *Bhāṣyakara* also confirms this fact while commencing the BSSB: “भगवान् पाराशर्यस्तद्विव्यप्रेरणापरिप्लावितान्तःकरणः संस्तप्रेरितसिद्धान्तैरेवाऽज्ञानं बोधयितुं, सन्दिग्धान् निष्ठापयितुं, निष्ठितांश्च दृढयितुमभिकाङ्क्षमाणो वेदान्ततत्त्वरहस्यात्मकाऽक्षरब्रह्मपरब्रह्मविषय-ब्रह्मविद्याविचारलक्षणं शास्त्रं सत्ररूपेणाऽवतारयामास” (BSSB 1/1/1, p.2)

“By the divine inspiration of Akṣarapuruṣottama, Lord Veda Vyāsa composed the *Brahmasūtras* for the purpose to grant wisdom to those who are ignorant and, to eradicate the doubts of those who do not possess faithful conviction of Parabrahman. Moreover, he wanted to make adamant those who are already firm. To fulfill his purpose, he composed this scripture which reflects the secret essence of the Veda in the form of Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.” In this way, the *Vacanāmṛta* and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya both felicitate Vyāsa. After Vedic literature, according to the Bhāṣyakāra, the *samradayika* authentic scriptures are:

वचनामृतशास्त्रं हि वार्ताश्च स्वामिनः शुभाः।

गुरुचरित्रग्रन्थाश्च प्रस्थानत्रयमुच्यते ॥¹⁵⁵

1. The Vedas with its four parts: *Samhitā*, *Brahmana*, *Aranyak* and *Upaniṣad*
2. *Itihāsa-Purāṇa-Smṛtiśāstra* if they follow the meaning of the Vedas.
3. The *Vacanāmṛta*, Guṇātitanand Svāmī's verses, *Brahmasvarūpa Gurus'* biographies.
4. *Siddhānta Patra*, written by Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja.
5. *Vacanāmṛta Rahasya* (Gujarati), *Svāminārāyaṇa Charita Mānasa* (Vraja).
6. *Akṣara-Puruṣottama Māhātmyam* (Sanskrit).

The scriptures mentioned above hold the foremost authority in Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana. They are all *sāṃpradāyika prasthānas*. However, at any type of

¹⁵⁵ SSSK 261

contention, the final authority as an interpreter holds the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru only.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the Bhāṣyakāra accepts all the scriptures authored by Vyāsaṁjī.

3.4.3.5 *Āpta-Vākya Pramāṇam*

As we discussed, verbal scripture testimony is the most reliable source (*pramāṇa*) among all the epistemological means whereby one can adequately know the nature of the transcendental, otherwise imperceptible Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman are indeed very difficult to know. The Bhāṣyakāra explains in the *Śuddha*:

शब्दो यो हि यथार्थः स्यात् प्रामाण्यं भजते सदा।

अन्यथा नैव प्रामाण्यं दुष्टशब्दादनर्थधीः ॥¹⁵⁷

“A verbal statement conveying valid knowledge must have an authentic source which must be free from defects. Otherwise, due to defects of spoiled intellect, it cannot be considered as a valid *pramāṇa*.” *Śabda pramāṇa* is verbal testimony. It is also called ‘*āpta-vākyas*’ (statement of a trust-worthy person’, and authentic word). Only a *āpta puruṣa* (trustworthy person) possessed of knowledge can impart accurate knowledge. Now, who is an *āpta puruṣa*? The Bhāṣyakāra investigates:

हेरुगुरोश्च यः शब्दः प्रमाणं निखिलो मतः।

तदुपदिष्टं सच्छास्त्रं प्रमाणं तत्कृतार्थकम् ॥¹⁵⁸

“Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and Guru are *āpta puruṣa*. Their words need no verification. In fact, their words become scriptures. As a result, these scriptures are counted as authentic scriptures.” Svāminārāyaṇa explains with an analogy: “Whatever the *āpta puruṣas* of the past have prescribed in the scriptures is valid. Take the example of a rich businessman. If he writes a draft to pay some other businessman, then although it seems that the piece of paper is not worth even a single rupee, it is indeed money. Only when one cashes the draft the businessman

¹⁵⁶ SSS, p.171

¹⁵⁷ SSSK, p.254

¹⁵⁸ SSSK, p.255

had signed does one subsequently receive a large sum of money from that very same draft. Similarly, although at the time there may not seem to be any benefit in observing the moral do's and don'ts, one who does observe *dharma* by the command of a great *Satpuruṣa* ultimately attains liberation - just as one receives cash from drafts.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/6, pp.395-396) Thus, in the *darśana* tradition, the trustworthy person has great significance. Not only to understand the meaning of the scriptures but also, have they provided valid guidance to a seeker who wants to advance on the path of spirituality.

3.4.3.6 Unknowable Becomes Knowable

Although the subject of the ultimate realities is unknowable and unimaginable, through authentic scriptures, one can understand the nature and form of the ultimate realities. Moreover, only scriptures are showing the way to have their *śāksātkāra*. Svāminārāyaṇa beautifully puts it in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Having contemplated in this way, one can realize everything that is described in the scriptures. After that, all remaining atheist feelings within one's *jīva* are resolved, and the *jīva* becomes extremely powerful. Besides, one develops a firm conviction that whatever is stated in the scriptures is true.” (Vac. Amd. 1, p.572) Interestingly, here, we must stop to face a controversy raised by Bhadrēśadāsa in his all-encompassing commentary of (BS 1/1/3).

The *sūtra* itself- *Śāstrayonitvāt* states that scripture is that by which one can know ‘Brahman,’ which has already been identified as the subject of the *Sūtrakāra*'s inquiry (BS 1/1/1) and minimally referred to as the cause of the world's origination, sustenance, and dissolution (BS 1/1/2). “अत्र सन्देहः। यथोक्तयोरक्षरब्रह्मपरब्रह्मणोजिज्ञास्ययोः प्रमाणमस्ति न वेति। किं प्राप्तम्। न किमपि प्रमाणमिति। कथम्। न तावद् बाह्यप्रत्यक्षप्रसरो बहिरिन्द्रियाऽग्राह्यत्वात्। नाप्याभ्यन्तरं प्रत्यक्षं, स्वात्मस्वज्ञानादीतरवस्तुरूपत्वात् । नाप्यनुमानं, तस्य प्रत्यक्षोपजीव्यत्वान्नियतसाहचर्यविशिष्टलिङ्गाद्यभावात्। नापि

शब्दस्तथाविधशब्दाभावादित्यप्रामाणिकत्वान्नाद्रियत इति प्राप्ते तत्र प्रमाणमवधारयति शास्त्रयोनित्वाद् इति। शास्त्रमेव भवति तत्र प्रमुखप्रमाणमित्यर्थः।” (BSSB 1/1/3, p.18)

“Here is doubt, is there any *pramāṇa* to reveal the form of inquired Brahman and Parabrahman? The opposition says that ultimate realities cannot be known with any *pramāṇa*. We know that the external *indriayas* are used in perception, which fall short because the ultimate realities are not subject to know by external human senses; it is not perceivable through internal *indriyas*. Moreover, inference falls short to grasp them because of its dependency on perception. Not even the scriptural words can entail them due to their own mix and different nature. In answer to these questions, that scriptures are the prominent *pramāṇa* in order to know the ultimate realities.”

Let us explain it in detail. The objection takes this form: *Upaniṣadik* statements such as

“From where speech returns ... having not attained it.”¹⁵⁹

“This Self, the immortal indweller, is the unseen seer, the unheard listener...”¹⁶⁰

“And that which is invisible, ungraspable...”¹⁶¹ etc. confirm that Parabrahman is beyond the subject of speech and sound; he cannot be described nor can he be heard. He is therefore unknowable by scriptures. Which, after all, are nothing but ‘a pile of words’.¹⁶² To this, the Bhāṣyakāra answers that these are the ramblings of those who have not grasped the true import of the scriptures and solely have faith in the imagined proficiency of their flawed reasoning. Statements such as the above serve simply to avow the unlimited nature of Parabrahman and the limited scope of human means. Indeed, it is by these very scriptures that this is established.¹⁶³ How can those

¹⁵⁹ TU 1/4/1

¹⁶⁰ BU 3/7/23

¹⁶¹ MU 1/1/6

¹⁶² 'यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते'(तै. २१/४/२, २१/९/१, 'तद्वा एतदक्षरं गार्ग्यदृष्टं द्रष्टुश्रुतम्' (बृ. ३(११/८/१, 'एष त आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यिमृताऽँ श्रोता' (बृ. ३(२३/७/१, 'यत्तद्रेष्यमग्राह्यम्' (मु. १(६/१/१)

¹⁶³ 'तं त्वौपनिषदं पुरुषम्' (बृ. ३(२६/९/१, 'सर्वे वेदा यत्पदमामनन्ति' (कठ. २(१५/१, 'वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यः' (गी. १५(१५/१)

same scriptures, which you, too, cite, then become invalid? If you argue, on the basis of these statements, that Parabrahman is not the subject of verbal testimony, then what will you make of other statements in those same set of scriptures, which describe him as knowable through scriptures? Such statements contain the following:

“That Self extolled in the *Upaniṣad* ...” (BU 3/9/26) “I alone am to be known by all of the Vedas.” (BG 15/15) They assure that, even with all their typical confines and inadequacies, words, when divinely spoken or inspired, can invaluablely serve as a reliable source of knowledge about Parabrahman. As always, though, we must also accept that this revelation, even though adequate, is never exhaustive. The Bhāṣyakāra’s debate at this *sūtra* (BSSB-1/1/3, pp.18-19) is interested in indicating the logical fallacies of the perspective that inferential reasoning is a valid means of knowing Brahman. In the process, he advances some of the same characteristics of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* system as in the previous *adhikaraṇas*. The Bhāṣyakāra first states that the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman is only attained through scripture, and cites a total of nineteen *Upaniṣadik* verses and two verses from the *Bhagavad Gītā* in defense of that. The *pūrvapakṣa* (opponent) concedes the point but then argues that Parabrahman can indeed be resolved through inference.

The Bhāṣyakāra then commences an extensive rejection of this perspective that is far more technical than its predecessors. A full engagement with this rejection presupposes considerable knowledge of *Navya Nyāya*—the system of logic as it developed in the second millennium—and its precise, systematic analysis categories. The debate exhibits Bhāṣyakāra’s significant coaching and sophistication. There is one other field of the Bhāṣyakāra’s position in which his commentary sets itself apart from the previous ones. In discussing the primacy of scriptural testimony in knowing about Brahman, the Bhāṣyakāra again centers the role of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru in arbitrating and preaching this scripture, based on the same scriptural texts cited in his commentary.

The *Prasthānatrayī* literature on this relevant topic is in large quantity. It has disclosed the rise of the significance of verbal testimony as a powerful means of knowledge. Such as ‘*Śastradiṣṭyā tupadeśo vāmadevavat* (1/1/31) The instruction (given by *Indra* about himself) (is possible) through insight based on scripture, as in the case of Vamadeva. ‘*Śrutestu śabdamulavat*’(2/1/28)- But (this is not so) on account of scriptural passages and on account of (Brahman) resting on scripture (only). ‘*Sarve Veda...*’(KU 2/15) That goal which all the Vedas glorify, which all austerities proclaim, desiring which (people) practice *brahmacarya* (a life of continence and service), that goal I tell you briefly--it is Akṣarabrahman. ‘*Yah śāstravidhim utsṛjya*’ (BG 16/23) One who acts under the influence of their desires, disobeying scriptures, neither attains perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal.

Therefore, let the scripture be your guide in determining what should be done and what should not be done. One should perform duty using scriptures as a guide. (BG 16/24) There are some supplementary factors that help the textual sentence to understand its meaning. Only that blend of words is called a sentence when four factors are taken care of. They are expectancy (*ākāṃkṣā*), consistency (*yogyatā*), contiguity (*āsatti*), and knowledge of the purport (*tātparya jñānam*). Understanding all this facilitates us to understand why verbal testimony is an independent means of knowledge very different from inference etc.¹⁶⁴

3.4.3.7 The Guru Who Interprets the Śabda

The Vedic texts are identified as *Śruti pramāṇa*. As far as the *Śruti*’s verbal testimony is considered, Svāminārāyaṇa stands for the synthesis (*samanvay*) of *Śruti* passages without disregarding, dismissing, or undermining the role of anyone or a set of *Śruti* -passages. He accentuates the need for the right approach and right

¹⁶⁴ SSS, p.166

interpretation of the *Śruti*'s. In order to do legitimacy to the *Śruti* passages and hold their correct import, one ought to study those (scriptural-passages) under the guidance of a *Sādhū* (Akṣara-Guru) who discerns their mystic interpretations and metaphysic-theistic significance. The true import and implication of *Śruti* passages can be deciphered only when one approaches the Akṣara-Guru, who is capable of unveiling mystic interpretation and divine intent of every *Śruti*. The Akṣara Guru possesses the valid insight to elucidate the proper connotation of the *Śruti*'s.¹⁶⁵

The secular word, if verified by a trustworthy person, is also a means of valid knowledge and could be authoritative. In his *Vacanāmṛta*, Svāminārāyaṇa speaks of the value of secular testimony. According to him, in the worldly matters of empirical truths and in practical life, the secular testimony of a trustworthy, reliable person also is equally important. In the tradition, Svāminārāyaṇa is adored as the supreme Parabrahman head; and therefore, in this *Sampradāya*, his words are accepted as – Parabrahman *Parameśvarapratyakṣadhārit Pramā*. I.e., the valid knowledge based on the eternal perception of the omniscient supreme Parabrahman head. Of course, the study of scriptures is a must, but neither by self-taught method nor through a spiritually uncommitted scholarly teacher. Instead, their study ought to be pursued from the Akṣara -Guru (*param ekāntika satpuruṣa*) who is spiritually enlightened and lives life in consonance with the works of the scriptures. Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “Therefore, one should only hear the holy scriptures from an enlightened *satpuruṣa*, but never from an unholy person.” (Vac. Loyā 11, p.322) The Akṣara-Guru is the scriptures personified, and hence, he alone can divulge the meanings and implied sense of the scriptural words. Only through him can one attain *ekāntik dharma*. The mere study is of no avail if one does not live accordingly.

¹⁶⁵ (Vac. Gaḍhaḍā-1/66, 2/13, Loyā-12)

Therefore, *ekāntika dharma* can only be attained by following the commands of a *Satpuruṣa* who is free of worldly desires and who has attained the state of Parabrahman-realization; it cannot be attained merely by reading books. Even if a person were to attempt to restate those talks exactly, having merely heard them, he would not be able to do so properly. Therefore, one can attain *ekāntik dharma* only from someone who has already attained the state of *ekāntik dharma*. Thus, the seeker ought to have the best faith in the Guru; while the Guru (teacher) ought to have the best wisdom.¹⁶⁶ Only when the Parabrahman possessed enlightened *Sādhu Satpuruṣa* enters a seeker's life that this secret scriptural lore becomes revealed to us.¹⁶⁷ However, one should not listen to scholars or so-called Gurus who are deficient in the resolute knowledge of the essential nature of Parabrahman, his transcendental glory, who has a definite form and shape.¹⁶⁸ Bhadreśadāsa further justifies it while commenting on the *Brahmasūtra*; he argues with those who are opposing the verbal testimony by indicating the scriptures' varying nature.

Bhadreśadāsa answers that only the Akṣarabrahman Guru can explain the true essence of the scriptures. He asserts: “साक्षात्कृतसकलशास्त्रतत्त्वस्य श्रोत्रियस्य साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपस्य परमात्मनिष्ठस्य गुरोः सदोपदेष्टृत्वं त्वपरमाप्तत्वं च प्रख्यापयत् प्रत्यक्षपरमात्मभावतस्तत्समुपसदनेनैव शास्त्रसेवनं नियमयति। अतस्तादृशगुरुपसत्तिहीनः स्वतः शास्त्रसेवी केवलशब्दजडस्त्वप्रामाणिक एवेति”(BSSB 1/1/3, p.23) “The *sūtra* itself explains that wise Akṣarabrahman Guru can explain the scriptures. So, the scriptures make the rule that one should learn the scriptures with Akṣarabrahman Guru. Without the firm refuge of such a Guru, one is considered as an inert who only knows about the mere meaning of the words.”

When we hear such glory of the verbal testimony among the other *pramāṇas*, then a doubt may erect that then what the extra need of the *Satpuruṣa* is? Well, the Indian

¹⁶⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/60

¹⁶⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/13

¹⁶⁸ Vac. Var. 13

ancient scriptures' explanation needs one to go beyond the rules of grammar and language, for it is the *samādhi bhāsa*. It entails non-literal interpretations for understanding many mystical passages and their consecutive order and ideas. The mystical, philosophical, and spiritual elements involve figurative language, symbols, analogical arguments, and metaphors anecdotes that essentially extend and complicate the task and the scope of the Vedic exegesis. Human speculations or hypotheses and logic cannot do justice to the central theme of the Vedas and the scriptures. Only the Guru, who is in constant communion with Parabrahman, knows the purpose and purport of Parabrahman as to what He intends to convey through them, can do justice to the Vedic exegesis. Therefore, the role and importance of Akṣara-Guru is highly extolled for understating both the correct meaning and implications of the scriptures.¹⁶⁹

The *Brahmasūtra* calls attention to that: “तर्काऽप्रतिष्ठानाद् अन्यथाऽनुमेयमिति चेदेवमप्यनिर्मोक्षप्रसङ्गः” ‘*Tarkāṣpratiṣṭhānād api*’)BS 2/1/21(“Also, because reasoning has no sure basis. (It cannot upset the conclusions of the Vedanta)”. The KU says: “*naiṣā tarkenāmatirapaneya*” (KU 1/2/9) “Not by reasoning is this thought attainable. Therefore, the best way to attain Him and know Him is through faith.” The *Gītā* declares: “तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥”) BG 4/34,(The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “ये हि ज्ञानिनः श्रोत्रियाः शास्त्ररहस्यज्ञाः तत्त्वदर्शिनः भगवन्नित्यदर्शना सकलशब्दबोध्यपरमतत्त्वपरमात्मसाक्षात्कारवन्तश्च साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरवः ते तुभ्यं ज्ञानं ब्रह्मविद्याम् उपदेक्ष्यन्ति” (BGSB 4/34, p.110) “Acquire this Parabrahman knowledge from a Parabrahman-realized

¹⁶⁹ The SSSK confirms:

गुरुश्च पञ्चमो वेदस्तच्छब्दश्रेष्ठता ततः॥२६०॥
 सिद्धान्ताऽनुगमन्यतु सर्वथा साम्प्रदायिकम्
 गुरुप्रमाणितं ह्येव प्रामाण्यपदवीं भजेत्॥२६२॥
 शास्त्रशब्दोऽपि नो सेव्यो गुरोराश्रयणं विना।
 गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थस्तु प्रकाशयेत् ॥२७१॥
 गुरुहरिबलं श्रेष्ठं शास्त्रवचोबलादपि।
 शास्त्रात्तु केवलात् क्वापि न ज्ञानं निश्चयः सुखम्॥२७२॥
 अतः शास्त्रं बलीयो न साक्षाद् ब्रह्माऽक्षराद् गुरोः ।
 नाऽसत्याद् वारयेच्छास्त्रं गुरुस्तु वारयेत् ततः॥२७३॥
 साक्षाद्वेदो भवेद् वाक्यं स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः ।

Guru by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. These *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus (plural application also confirms manifestation of the Gurus in the future) have realized the truth and will teach you.”

The *Upaniṣad* states: ‘ तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्) ’MU 1/2/12,(“In order to realize that *brahmadevīdyā*, one must go to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, who has realized the essence of scriptures and having the firm conviction of Parabrahman.” Thus, for the realization of knowledge and determined understanding of Parabrahman, the best faith, good spatial-temporal conditions, and the best preacher with the highest knowledge and conviction of Parabrahman is expected. Furthermore, in the company of a true *Sādhu* (*Akṣara* -Guru), a person of firm faith attains all virtues, including the right knowledge. A seeker who has trust and faith in the words of scriptures and *Akṣara* -Guru alone gains the right knowledge and resolute understanding of the nature of Parabrahman; he alone remains steadfast in *dharma* and attains emancipation. In this way, we have discussed here the role of the Guru in verifying the scripture, regarded as a powerful means in the area of epistemology. Since the importance of the Guru in the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is extremely venerated; thus, the other aspects of the Guru will be discussed elaborately in the next chapter.

4.4.4 Analogy

Upamāna (analogy) is a means of valid knowledge. Here the instrument or the means is the knowledge of the relation between a name and the object denoted by it. For example, a townsman who is ignorant of the meaning of the word ‘*gavay*’ (wild cow) learns from a forester that the ‘*gavay*’ is a forest animal similar to the cow. Thereafter he goes to a forest and sees the animal called ‘*gavay*’. Remembering the information he had received from the forester, he now knows that

the animal he sees is his denotation of the name ‘*gavay*.’¹⁷⁰ When we study the *Vacanāmṛta* and reflect upon it, we realize that Svāminārāyaṇa has used this means of knowledge on a large scale. As examined earlier, the subject of discussion throughout the *Vacanāmṛta* is spiritual. Such mystical and profound spiritual philosophy is difficult to comprehend for even the learned scholar, let alone the uneducated. That is why, throughout the *Vacanāmṛta*, he has skillfully, be it in concise or great detail, explained whatever, to whomever, whenever, using just the right analogy, proverb, idiom, or logical deduction.

3.4.4.1 A Simple Way to Understand

Since time immemorial, analogy has been the best way to present difficult principles in an effortless way. *Vacanāmṛta* is an excellent example of this doctrine. Svāminārāyaṇa demonstrates: “For instance, if twenty pails of water are drawn from a well, and the flow of water from each pail allowed to flow in distinct directions, then there would be little force in each flow. However, if the flow of all twenty pails of water is merged, then the resultant flow would become exceptionally powerful - like that of a river - and would not be diverted by any means whatsoever. Similarly, when a person’s mind’s flows have become free of worldly desires, his *chitta* focuses only on Parabrahman’s form.”¹⁷¹ (Vac. Gadh. 1/25, p.70) Similarly, He describes, small streamlet of water (Gaḍh. 2/2), saline land (Sār.18), A pulley for drawing water (Gaḍh. 2/1), seeds of a chili plant, neem tree, or *śiṃgaḍiyo vachanāga* (Gaḍh. 3/14), a stone placed on the edge of the well-(Gaḍh. 2/1, 33), the tip of a spear (Kār.1), a war and enemies (Gaḍh. 1/70, 2/22), a gold string (Gaḍh. 3/21) etc.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains analogies with colloquial examples: “A person who has seen faults in Parabrahman or His *bhakta* should be known to be like a rabid dog.

¹⁷⁰ Śrutiprakāśa Svāmī, *op.cit.*, p.18

¹⁷¹ Twenty pails of water, Kośa, a leather bag used for drawing water in a farm

Just as one who is affected by the saliva of a rabid dog also becomes rabid, similarly, if one listens to the talks of or keeps love for one who has perceived faults in Parabrahman or His *bhakta*, then both the person who keeps the affection, as well as the listener, becomes like an atheist or non-believer.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/12, p. 602) In the same way, *līlāgara bhāṃga* (a drink containing hemp)... *gabaragaṃḍa* (a fool)...” (Gaḍh. 1/18), like an animal... (Gaḍh. 1/18, 21, 3/27), like a mirror... (Gaḍh.1/47), a cat-like devotee... (Gaḍh. 2/57) As we mentioned, the Indian traditional texts are not the subject of mere debate or thought process; in fact, they serve as a base for a seeker to fulfill his spiritual goal. Hence, they used analogies with colloquial examples to quickly understand the super-spiritual, philosophical principles. Therefore, this method is invariably used in the scriptures. The *Prasthānatrayī* is full of such analogical examples:

3.4.4.1.1 In the *Brahmasūtra* -

अत एव चोपमासूर्यकादिवत् – therefore, also (with respect to Parabrahman, we have) comparisons like the images of the sun (3/2/18). पटवत् - and like a piece of cloth (Parabrahman pervades the universe like cloth- thread fusion) (2/1/20), क्षीरवद्भि - if it be said that (Parabrahman without extraneous aids) cannot (be the cause of the world) because (an agent) is seen to collect materials (for any construction), (we say) no, since it is like milk turning into curd (2/1/25), तृणादिवत् - and not like grass, etc. Because of its absence elsewhere. (*pradhāna* is refuted as a creator) (2/2/5).

3.4.4.1.2 In the *Upaniṣad*:

“कथं नु भगवः स आदेशो भवतीति” Śvetaketu asked: “What is that instruction, venerable Sir?” इति श्वेतकेतुना पृष्टे पितुर्वचनम् ‘यथा सोम्यैकेन मृत्पिण्डेन सर्वं मृण्मयं विज्ञातं भवति वाचारम्भणं विकारो नामधेयं मृत्तिकेत्येव सत्यम्... एवं सौम्य स आदेशो भवति” (CU 6/1/4-6) “Just as, my dear, by one clod of clay, all that is made of clay is known, the modification being only a name, arising from speech, while the truth is that all is clay.” When Kauśalya asks about the origin of

prāṇa, Pippalāda Guru answers “यथैषा पुरुषे छायेतस्मिन्नेतदाततं मनोकृतेनायात्यस्मिञ्छरीरं॥ यथा सम्राडेवाधिकृतान् विनियुङ्क्ते। एतान् ग्रामानेतान् ग्रामानधितिष्ठस्वेत्येवमेवैष प्राण इतरान्प्राणान् पृथक्पृथगेव सन्निधत्ते” (PU 3/3-4)

“Like this shadow of a person, the breath spreads in this body (from the self) by the actions of the mind.” “यथोर्णनाभिः सृजते गृह्णते च यथा पृथिव्यामोषधयः सम्भवन्ति यथा सतः पुरुषात केशलोमानि तथाक्षरात् सम्भवतीह विश्वम्” (MU 1/1/7), “As the spider sends forth and draws in its thread, as plants grow on the earth, as from every man hair spring forth on the head and the body, thus does everything arise here from the Indestructible.” “अप्रमत्तेन वेद्धव्यं शरवत् तन्मयो भवेत्” (MU 2/2/4) “Om is the bow, the self is the arrow, Brahman is called its aim. It is to be hit by a man who is not thoughtless; and then, as the arrow (becomes one with the target), he will become one with Brahman.”

“काठकैरप्याम्नातं ‘सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः’” (KU 1/6)

“Like grain, the mortal decays and like grain again springs up (is reborn).”

“यः सेतुरीजानानामक्षरं ब्रह्म यत् परम्” (KU 3/2)

“May we also know the One, who is the highest imperishable Brahman for those who desire to cross over to the other shore which is beyond fear.”

“आत्मानं रथिनं विद्धि शरीरं रथमेव तु” (KU 3/3)

“Know the *ātman* (self) as the lord of the chariot and the body as the chariot. Know also the intellect to be the driver and mind the reins.”

3.4.4.1.3 In the *Gītā*

“स्थितप्रज्ञस्य का भाषा” (BG 2/54)

“Arjuna asked: O Kṛṣṇā, what are the attributes of an enlightened person whose intellect is steady? What does a person of steady intellect think and talk about? How does such a person behave with others and live in this world?” Kṛṣṇā answers:

“यदा संहरते चायं कूर्मोऽङ्गानीव सर्वशः” (BG 2/58)

“When one can thoroughly withdraw the senses from the sense objects, as a tortoise withdraws its limbs into the shell for protection from calamity, then the intellect of such a person is considered steady.” And as

“आपूर्यमाणम् अचलप्रतिष्ठं समुद्रमापः प्रविशन्ति यत् तद्वत् कामा यं प्रविशन्ति सर्वे” (BG 2/70)

“One attains peace when all desires dissipate within the mind without creating any mental disturbance, as river waters enter the full ocean without creating any disturbance.”

“धूमेनाव्रियते वह्निर्यथाऽऽदर्शी मलेन च। यथोल्बेनावृतो गर्भस्तथा तेनेदमावृतम्॥” (BG 3/38)

“As the fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror by dust, and as an embryo by the amnion, similarly, self-knowledge gets covered by different degrees of this insatiable lust, the eternal enemy of the wise.” The method of presenting analogy in the *Prasthānatrayī* clearly indicates its significance in implementing the philosophy in one’s life. As far as the Bhāṣyakāra’s perspective on analogy is concerned, not only does he expound on all these above-mentioned verses, but he also uses an independent analogy to make easier the philosophical debate in the *Prasthānatrayī*. For example, in the MU commentary, Bhadrēśadāsa states: “A seeker has to understand that Om is the bow; the *ātman* is the arrow; Brahman is said to be the mark. It is to be struck by an undistracted mind. Then the *ātman* becomes one with Brahman, as the arrow with the target. Om is the symbol of Brahman and, therefore, a meditation on Om leads to the realization of Brahman. The individual self is compared to the arrow, which hits the target because the individual, which is a limited reflection, gets dissolved in the original through intense concentration, association, and meditation, even as the arrow that is shot by pulling the bow-string gets unified with its target.”¹⁷² Then he presents the argument that, “तथा मुमुक्षुभिरपि ब्रह्म लक्ष्यतयाऽऽलक्ष्य स्वात्मनस्तत्र संलग्नताऽऽपादनीयेति भावः। नन्वक्षराधिपतेः पुरुषोत्तमस्यैव परमलक्ष्यत्वे कथमत्र ब्रह्मणो लक्ष्यत्वमुच्यत इति चेदुच्यते, अक्षराधिपतिरेव लक्ष्यमिति तु सिद्धान्त एव। तथाऽपि ब्रह्मभावाऽऽप्तभक्ताऽनुभूयमानः स स्वदिव्यब्रह्मधाम्नि सदैव विराजमानस्तिष्ठत्यतस्तत्परब्रह्मप्राप्तीच्छयैव तदधिष्ठानरूपस्य ब्रह्मधाम्नो लक्ष्यत्वं

¹⁷² MUSB 2/4/4, p. 273

सारङ्गपुरस्थप्रियजनप्राप्तिच्छया सारङ्गपुरप्राप्तिच्छावद् मञ्जूषास्थसुवर्णरत्नादिदिप्राप्तिच्छया वा मञ्जूषाप्राप्तिच्छावज्ज्ञेयम्”
(MUSB 2/4/4, p. 273)

“Brahman is compared to a target (Akṣaradhām, which is a form of Brahman), not because it is away from the arrow which can hit it, but it is the ultimate experience which is gained when the personality of the self is lost. But the opposition objects that the ultimate target is not Brahman, it is the Parabrahman, which is not mentioned here.” The Bhāṣyakāra explains it with a super analogy; “when one wants to go to Sāraṅgपुरा that means he wants to have *darśana* of Guru who lives in Sāraṅgपुरा. Moreover, he says that when someone needs money, he says give me the box from the almirah. In the same manner, when someone targets to go to Akṣaradhāma, it suggests that he wants to have a *sākṣātkāra* of Parabrahman.” At the end, the commentary reads:

“अत एवाऽक्षराधिपतिवचनमपि सङ्गच्छते ‘भगवद्धाम तु लक्ष्यस्थानीयम्’ (वच.ग.म.२२ (इति)”¹⁷³

“The Bhāṣyakāra admitted that same thing is described in the *Vacanāmṛta* that Akṣarabrahman, the abode of Parabrahman, is the goal.” However, analogy is the most frequently used as a means of knowledge in the scriptures, yet it is not proficient to thoroughly realize the highest realities. Because all the examples used are *māyic*, so how could one realize *amāyic* entities, which are unparalleled, through them. Nonetheless, they are respected as means of knowledge since they are originated from the scriptures. The Bhāṣyakāra expresses this feeling in the *Śuddha*¹⁷⁴ that however Akṣara and Puruṣottama are eternally divine yet we are using such *māyic* examples only to understand these ultimate realities.

¹⁷³ MUSB 2/4/4, p.273

¹⁷⁴ “इदमत्र ज्ञेयम् ,अक्षरपुरुषोत्तमयोर्नित्यदिव्यत्वादत एव सर्वतोऽतिविलक्षणत्वादेव निरूपमावेव ताविति तत्स्वरूपबोधने प्राकृतोपमानमात्रमकिञ्चित्करमेव । एवं सत्यपि न तत्प्रमाणत्वमनाद्रियते ज्ञानसौकर्याय च समाद्रियते । यथाऽलौकिके नाऽनुमानप्रसर इति खण्डितमेव बहुभिस्तथापि न तत्प्रामाण्यं तिरस्कृतं तथेह बोध्यम्” ।) SSS, p.165)

5. *Pramā*

5.1 What is *Pramā*?

Pramā, *jñāna*, or knowledge has a significant part in the study of epistemology. Svāminārāyaṇa highlights its glory: “The *Shrutis* state: ‘*rute gnanan na mukti*’ and ‘*tamev viditva*’. These Vedic verses broadcast that the *jīva* attains liberation only when it realizes the true *jñāna* of Parabrahman. So liberation can only be attained by *jñāna*.” (Vac. Loyā 7, p. 300) The Bhāṣyakāra presents the definition of *pramā*:

ज्ञानं प्रमात्मकं ज्ञेयं यथाऽवस्थितवस्तुनः।

यथा शुक्तावियं शुक्ती रजते रजतं तथा ॥¹⁷⁵

“Of whatever description anything is, when our idea of that thing is of that same description, it is called a right knowledge; as, in the case of silver, the idea of its being silver. That is called *pramā* (commensurate with its object).” Moreover, he also provides a general perspective of *pramā*, which we discussed earlier.¹⁷⁶

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya’s understanding of *jñāna* is more so directly related to *brahmavidyā*. By which one can obtain the knowledge of eternal entities, called *brahmavidyā*.¹⁷⁷ The juxtaposition of *jñāna*’s association with *brahmavidyā* is partially attributed to the cognitive nature of both. The commentary of *Gītā* 3/3 identifies “*jñāna* as characterized by the knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness.” The knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness here refers to understanding. So ultimately, in the Svāminārāyaṇa School, to know the ultimate realities means to know the *brahmavidyā*. In the same way, as we know that Parabrahman is divine (*divya*), the all-doer (*kartā*), with form (*sākāra*), higher than all others (*sarvoparī*), and present (*pragaṭa*), it is also reflective of MUSB 1/2/13’s

¹⁷⁵ SSSK 229

¹⁷⁶ लौकिकं दिव्यं चोभयं भवति प्रमेयम् । तत्प्रमाकरणजातं विमर्शनीयमेव । तथाऽपि यदि प्रमेयग्रहणप्रकारस्य स्फुटमवगमश्चेद् भवतु प्रमाणाऽऽधिक्यम् ।) स्वा. सि. सु., पृष्ठ-१४९(अक्षरपुरुषोत्तमयोर्निखिलज्ञानं नित्यं प्रमाणनिरपेक्षं स्वतश्च प्रमेव परब्रह्मणस्तन्नित्येच्छयाऽक्षरब्रह्मणश्चेत्युभयोः सर्वकारणत्वसर्वज्ञत्वनियामकत्वादेश्च । वदति च शास्त्रमक्षरपुरुषोत्तमयोः सर्वज्ञत्वम् । यथा^१ यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद्^२ ’मु. १/१/९ (इत्यादावक्षरस्य ।^३ विज्ञातारमरे केने विज्ञानीयात्^४ ’बृ. २/४/१४ (इत्यादौ पुरुषोत्तमस्येति ।) स्वा. सि. सु., पृष्ठ-१५०(pp.1-2).

¹⁷⁷ MUSB-1/2/13

understanding of *brahmavidyā* (the knowledge of Brahman), where Brahman is analyzed as a dual number nominal inflection that refers to both Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.

While '*jñāna*' can be identified as *brahmavidyā* by the previous explications, further, the commentary of *Gītā* 16/1 expands the content of this knowledge to beyond just Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. It explains *jñāna* as knowledge which is characterized by 1) the knowledge of the five entities: *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman, and Parabrahman, as they truly are; and 2) which is characterized by conviction in the form of Parabrahman. According to this exposition, the compound *jñāna* refers to the knowledge of all five entities in addition to the firm conviction of Parabrahman. In addition to this, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra also explores this principle in the context of the following *śloka*: 'न हि ज्ञानेन सदृशं पवित्रमिह विद्यते' "truly, there is no purifier in this world like the true knowledge of the Supreme Being (Brahman and Parabrahman). One discovers this knowledge in due course of time (when one's mind is cleansed of the *māyic* attributes by the firm conviction (*yoga*) of Parabrahman.¹⁷⁸ 'ज्ञानं तेऽहं सविज्ञानमिदं' "I shall fully explain to you the *brahmavidyā* that includes the self-knowledge together with the manifest form of Parabrahman. After knowing that nothing more remains to be known in this world."¹⁷⁹ In this manner, the Svāminārāyaṇa School declares *pramā* as the knowledge of the five ontological eternal entities.

5.2 Realistic Epistemology

In the Indian Vedic system, *pramā* and *pramāṇa* study is the key factor to attain *vidyā*. A cognitive state that has been achieved through a *pramāṇa* is more likely to be a *pramā*, a *true* (valid) cognition than one is accomplished by some other means. In its straightforward form, we call it true knowledge. According to Svāminārāyaṇa,

¹⁷⁸ BGSB 4/38, p.112

¹⁷⁹ BG 7/2, pp.156-157

knowledge is a synonym of understanding.¹⁸⁰ Knowledge is understood as definite, doubt-free, truthful, awareness of the thing episode or concept, especially about the true nature of ontological realities i.e., Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *īśvaras*, *jīvas*, *māyā*, and the products evolved from *māyā* including the cognitive/conative senses and non-sentient products and the rest of the world.

Here, we have to take into account that Svāminārāyaṇa's epistemology is realistic, for it is based on well ascertained veridical experience both at worldly empirical and transcendental levels. This enables the knower in understanding the true nature of reality and in making the right endeavor to realize the highest goal. The theory of knowledge helps in knowing the nature of every real entity of a given metaphysical system, in addition to knowing the validity of the system. As a realist in the opinion of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya,¹⁸¹ valid knowledge corresponds to real objects. The world of experience is real. Knowledge necessarily relates to the real. All knowledge is valid, but metaphysical knowledge, *adhyātma jñāna* of *ātman* and Paramātmā has lasting value. The world is real and it cannot be dismissed as a mere illusion or appearance. At the dawn of right knowledge and Parabrahman *sākṣātkāra* or Parabrahman realization, the world of plurality does not cease to exist, in the mind of the enlightened devotee rather, one sees in everything the presence of Parabrahman. Again, it is the state of mind of the enlightened devotee, but the world and all others do exist. According to the Bhāṣyakāra, the entities are:

“नित्याः सत्याः सदैवैते मिथो भिन्नाः स्वरूपतः.”¹⁸²

“The knowledge of five eternal ontological entities is real and eternal; they are distinct to each other as well.” In this sense, knowledge is a comprehension of reality with predicates or qualitative determination. Reality is always known as characterized by determinate adjectives or qualities. That is why, Parabrahman, the

¹⁸⁰ Vac. Loya 7

¹⁸¹ BSSB 1/1/1, p.8; 1/1/2, p.16

¹⁸² SSSK 3

supreme entity, is always conceived as characterized by being the knowledge of *sadā sākāra*,¹⁸³ and *saguṇa*,¹⁸⁴ in short, the subject-predicate situation is fundamental to epistemology and metaphysics of Svāminārāyaṇa. Thus, the knowledge of reality is impossible unless it is accepted as characterized by determinate features. Any knowing is meaningful only when what is known is concrete and qualified. In other words, the fundamental requirement in any knowledge process is its subject-predicate situation.

5.3 The Knower-known-knowing

There are three factors in every knowledge situation: the knower, the known, and the function of knowing. To illustrate, when I say that I know this house, here ‘I’ is the knower, the self as the subject who knows, this house is the object known, and the word know points out to the act of knowing. For Svāminārāyaṇa, the knower (*jñātā*) the subject of knowledge, the known (*jñeyā*) the object of knowledge and the knowledge (*jñāna*) are different and real. They all are there in every knowledge situation. Without the interplay between the knower and the known, knowledge cannot arise. The self, the knower, is fundamental nature of consciousness (*cidrūpa jñānasvarup*) and at the same time, it also has knowledge cognition as its essential inseparable quality (*jñānaśakti*) which pervades the whole body (*antaḥkaraṇa* and sensory-motor organs) and knows the objects of knowledge (*jñeyapadārtha*) external and internal. As the revealer of body, senses, the presiding deities (powers) of senses, mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) and objects of experience, the self (*jīvātmā*) is very pervasive and great on account of its *jñānaśakti* (attributive knowledge).¹⁸⁵ Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies: “That is identified as *ātman*. *Ātman* is the cognizer of sound, touch, color, taste, and smell, and it is the *ātman* who thinks and discriminates. The conscious entity from within who knows the distinction of body,

¹⁸³ Vac. Gaḍh. 1/37,40,45,71, loyā-7, Pāñ. 1,7, Gaḍh. 2/10,39, Gaḍh. 3/30,32,35, Amd. 6

¹⁸⁴ Vac. Gaḍh. 1/33,66, Sār. 6, Kār.8, Gaḍh. 2/8,14, 31, 42

¹⁸⁵ Vac. Kar. 1

senses, mind etc., is the knowing self *jivātmān*. It is knower, narrator, explicator, and confirmer of these distinctions and it itself distinct from body senses mind etc. it is the knowing subject, the receptacle of all knowledge.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/38, p.98)

During the waking state, on account of the dominance of *satvaguṇa*, the knowledge (revealing the power of *jñānaśakti*) is evident and distinct, during the dreaming state on account of the prevalence of *rajoguṇa*, it is very unclear, dim and ambiguous while in a deep sleep on account of the dominance of *tamoguṇa*, the revealing power of consciousness (*jñānaśakti*) is dormant and unmanifest. Self-consciousness is the significant revelation of the self. It is not amenable to perception, yet it is the indispensable base of all perception. In every act of knowing, the self-i.e. the subject *jivātmā* becomes known. In every act of experiencing, the existence of the self *jivātmā* is apodictically known revealed immediately as the basic presupposition of all knowledge. As mentioned above, the *ātman* is the knower of knowledge of knowable objects. So, *ātman* is described as *kartā*, *jñātā*, and *bhoktā*.¹⁸⁶

Ultimately what is the use of this *pramā* or *jñāna* in the philosophy? Well, the knowledge of object as it is i.e., *yathārtha jñāna* is the foundation of philosophical activity. Therefore, one ought to know the reality of the thing as they actually are, rather than the way they are conceived or perceived. This implies that reality is concerned with how we know reality. But epistemology does not determine metaphysics. Instead, it follows metaphysics. In Svāminārāyaṇa’s Vedānta philosophy, epistemology follows metaphysics, because Parabrahman as the *ātman* and *antaryāmī* in all and is the supporter and immanent ground of all other reals. Valid knowledge arises when the conditions generating knowledge are sound. The sense organs must function well and the mind i.e., *antaḥkāraṇa*, must be alert, attentive, and receptive while apprehending a knowable object. The self, when is

¹⁸⁶ IUSB 2, p.9, BSSB 2/3/19, p.233, BSSB 2/3/33, p.240

fully involved and engaged, the right knowledge arises. Such knowledge is indubitable, and it gives rise to a settled conviction or resolute understanding of the object known. Moreover, one should remember that *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are totally dependent on Brahman and Parabrahman for their knowledge. As reminded,

“तत्तत्क्रियासामर्थ्यप्रदाता अक्षराधिपतिः वेदादिशास्त्रेषु प्रसिद्धः” (KeUSB 1/2, p.34)

“Parabrahman who is the master of Akṣaradhāma and transcendent Akṣarabrahman provides power to *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. It is described all over the Vedānta scriptures.”¹⁸⁷

5.4 Classification of Ultimate *Pramā*

The *Gītā* describes:

इदं तु ते गुह्यतमं प्रवक्ष्याम्यनसूयवे ।

ज्ञानं विज्ञानसहितं यज्ज्ञात्वा मोक्षयसेऽशुभात् ॥¹⁸⁸

“O Arjuna, since you have faith in my words, I shall reveal to you the most profound, secret, supreme knowledge, together with supreme experience. Knowing this, you shall be freed from the miseries of worldly existence.” Bhadrēśadāsa explains through his commentary: “गुह्यतमम् अतिशयेन गोप्यम् । गुह्यमात्मस्वरूपवेदनम् । गुह्यतरमक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपवेदनम् आत्मनोऽप्यन्तःस्थत्वात् । गुह्यतमं परमात्मवेदनम् अक्षरब्रह्मणोऽप्यात्मत्वात् । यद्वा शरीराद्यन्तःस्थस्याऽऽत्मनोऽतिसूक्ष्मत्वात्तज्ज्ञानं गद्यम् । ...विज्ञानसहितं विविधप्रकारेण तन्माहात्म्यज्ञानविशिष्टं ज्ञानं परमात्मस्वरूपनिश्चयाऽनुकूलं ज्ञानं प्रवक्ष्ये” । (BGSB 9/1, p.201)

“Here, the Bhāṣyakāra presents an exegetical study about the three types of knowledge. 1. Secret knowledge (self) 2. More secret knowledge (Akṣarabrahman’s) and 3. The most secret knowledge (Parabrahman’s). Taken together, this knowledge results in the ultimate liberation of the *jīva* and *īśvara*. Kṛṣṇā wants to reveal this knowledge to consolidate the conviction of Arjuna

¹⁸⁷ We will explore this topic shortly.

¹⁸⁸ BG 9/1

towards ultimate realities.” Similarly, the *Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya* states while commenting on the *sūtra*:

“अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा” (BS 1/1/1)

“Then, therefore, the inquiry into Brahman.” The SB enunciates: “ज्ञातुमिच्छा जिज्ञासा । ब्रह्मशब्देन यथोक्तदिव्यतत्त्वद्वयाऽभिधानाद् जिज्ञासापदस्येष्यमाणाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमज्ञानेच्छेत्यर्थः । स्वविषयप्राधान्यप्रकृतित्वाच्चेच्छायास्तद्विषय-भूताऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमाख्यदिव्यतत्त्वद्वयज्ञानप्रवृत्तेरिह विधानम् । ज्ञानं चेह ध्यानोपासनादिरूपम्” (BSSB 1/1/1, p.8) “The innermost will to know (to attain knowledge of) Brahman and Parabrahman is *jijñāsā* (inquiry). Here, the aphorism indicates that the will needs three things: 1. who wills (seeker), 2. The subject of will (Brahman and Parabrahman), and 3. The action of willing (meditation, worship, etc.).”

The *Upaniṣad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* highlights it in the same way: “विद्ययाऽमृतमश्नुते” (IU 11) “The seeker attains emancipation through knowledge.” The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “विद्यया...पुरुषोत्तमनारायणस्योत्तमनिर्विकल्पनिश्चयादिरूपेणविज्ञानेनेत्यर्थः । एतादृशं विशिष्टं ज्ञानमेव ब्रह्मविद्या परा विद्याऽध्यात्मविद्येत्यादिशब्दैः प्रशस्तं श्रुतिस्मृत्यादिषु । अमृतमश्नुते जनिमृतिहेतुभूती मायामतिक्रम्य मरणधर्मवर्जितमविनाशिनं मोक्ष प्राप्नोतीत्यर्थः ।” (IUSB 11, p.21)

“The Bhāṣyakāra defines the glory of knowledge that with the firm conviction of Parabrahman and the knowledge which the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru gives, is called *brahmavidyā* and *adhyātmavidyā* which is elaborately described in the *Śrutis* and that includes *ātma*-realization and all the daily spiritual routine like *sevā*, *karma*, *bhakti*, etc. this knowledge brings the liberation.” However, from the aforementioned discussions, we know that the knowledge of the five entities is not merely of copulative or coordinative composition. The realization of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman consequents in the knowledge of the five eternal entities¹⁸⁹. More specifically, for Parabrahman’s cognition, there is no need of any *pramāṇa*

¹⁸⁹ BSSB-1/1/1, p.10

since Akṣarabrahman, Parabrahman and a person who became the *brahmarūpa* through the grace of them have self-proven knowledge.¹⁹⁰

5.5 The Process of Attaining Knowledge

Parabrahman as the witness (*sākṣī*) resides in the *jīva*, and the *jīva* pervades the *buddhī* (intellect-mind). So, when we say that, - ‘the mind (intellect/*buddhi*) is the knower, we simply mean that it is the self (*jīva*) who is the knower, because *buddhi* in itself is *jaḍa* (inert) as a product of *prakṛti*. Hence, it cannot be the real knower. Further, when we say that - ‘the self (*jīva*) is the knower,’ we simply mean that it is not a knower independently by itself, without Parabrahman as the inner self and the provider controller of knowing power (*jñānaśakti*) to the self (*jīva*). Therefore, without Parabrahman as the source and support of its cognitional ability, the *jīva* cannot be called the knower and the agent.

In this manner, when the mental modification (*vṛtti*) through sense organs goes out to the object and together with senses when the mind and the self (*jīva*) cooperate and when *vṛtti* gets modified and assumes the form of that object and returns, and in this way when the form (or the gestalt configuration) of that object penetrates and gets set in the mind, the right knowledge of that object as it actually is, arises. This happens when the *sākṣī* (the witness), who resides in *jīva*, but who stands higher than the self (*jīva*) has confirmed that knowledge (apprehension). The *Vacanāmṛta* reveals this fact: “The *buddhi* permeates this body from head to toe. As a result, it is concurrently aware of the activities of all of the *indriyas*. The *jīva* exists within that *buddhi* by pervading it. So, the awareness of the *buddhi* is due to the awareness of the *jīva*. Correspondingly, since the witness resides within that *jīva*, the *jīva*’s awareness is due to the witness’s awareness.” (Vac. Kar. 4, p. 258) The conviction in knowledge is gained when *sākṣī* confirms it. The knowledge

¹⁹⁰ नित्योद्भासितबोधत्वान्मानाऽनधीनसिद्धितः। मानवश्यं न वै मेयम् अक्षरपरमात्मनोः ॥स्वासिसुका. २२६॥ तत्कृपालब्धप्रज्ञानां ब्रह्मभूताऽऽत्मनां तथा। सर्वार्थानां समुद्भासान्वैवाऽस्ति मानवश्यता॥स्वासिसुका२२७॥ अतो मानात् प्रमेयस्य सिद्धिरिति तु केवलम्। बद्धात्मनियतं ज्ञेयं यद्धि वादेषु योज्यते॥स्वासिसुका. २२८॥

attained through any *pramāṇa* (perception, inference, testimony, etc.) becomes innately acceptable or non-acceptable as according to the sanction or denial of the certitude by the *sākṣī*. The *sākṣī* stands higher than *buddhi* and *jīva*. The *sākṣī* is the *antaryāmī* Parabrahman himself. If the certitude-granting *sākṣī* is rejected, there can be no spiritual knowledge nor a coherent metaphysical thesis.

Herewith Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, also resides in the *jīva*. So, they both are called *sākṣī*. They dwell in our hearts but no one is capable of distinguishing between their light. In fact, though, they are absolutely distinct from each other, but no one is capable of seeing these distinctions. The only one who receives a divine body composed of divine light by the grace of Parabrahman realizes, ‘This is my self, this is *puruṣa*, this is Akṣara, and this is Parabrahman who is distinct from all.’ In this way, one can see them separately and their light distinctly.¹⁹¹ So, the actual process starts with the *indriyas*. It associates with the object. Thereafter, the mind and intellect perform their role. As a result, when all three - the *indriyas*, the mind, and the *jīva*- combine and indulge in an object, then the *vṛtti* develops an intense force. Thus, when the *vṛtti* of the *indriyas* enter the object, the mind and *jīva* also go along with the *vṛtti*; then, the object is seen and fully recognized.¹⁹²

In the knowledge of substances, the medium dimension is caused by the relation of inherence. In the perception of qualities, actions, etc., which is inherent in substances, it is a cause by the relation of their inherence in its substratum. It is being the substratum of that conjunction of the mind that is the cause of knowledge. Ultimately it brings knowledge to the *jīva*. The Bhāṣyakāra reminds us: “आत्मा संकल्पविशेषेण मनसा ज्ञानशक्त्या सम्बद्ध्यते पुनश्च मनोवृत्तिपुरस्कारेणन्द्रियेण समनइन्द्रियवृत्तिश्चार्थेनेति ग्रहणप्रकारः ।”)SSS, p.153) “*Ātman* with its resolution and with cognitive power combines to the mind, and all these consequently reach to the subject, this is how one attains knowledge.”

¹⁹¹ Vac. Loya 15

¹⁹² Vac. Loya 10

Again, by commenting on the *Bhagavad-Gītā*'s *śloka*, the Bhāṣyakāra confirms the perspective of Svāminārāyaṇa on account of processing the knowledge.

शरीरवाङ्मनोभिर्यत्कर्म प्रारभते नरः

न्याय्यं वा विपरीतं वा पञ्चैते तस्य हेतवः ॥¹⁹³

“These are the five causes of all action, whether right or wrong, one performs by thought, word, and deed.” The SB explains: “नरो मानवः शरीरवाङ्मनोभिः शरीरेण वागादीन्द्रियैर्मनसा च सह । संयुज्य न्याय्यं वा न्यायाऽनुमोदितं विपरीतं वा अन्याय्यं वा यद् यत्किमपि कर्म प्रारभते कुरुते । तस्य कर्मणः एते प्रागुक्ताः शरीरादयः पञ्च हेतवो कारणानि भवन्ति ॥ (BGSB 18/15, p. 345) “Every action, appropriate or inappropriate, performed by a person, adopt the system in which firstly, the *indriya* first connects with the object, then mind and ultimately, gets the knowledge of the action he performs.” The Bhāṣyakāra describes here the process of knowledge which is the most significant findings to emerge from this topic. Therefore, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra does not differ from the basic principles of Svāminārāyaṇa.

6. The Ultimate Knowers

As Svāminārāyaṇa clarified that Brahman and Parabrahman reside in the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. Hence, by their witness, *jīveśvarās* become able to attain knowledge. In the same way, the *Brahmasūtra* states:

“स्थानादिव्यपदेशाच्च” (BS 1/2/14)

“And because abode etc. (ruling the eye) are attributed to it (by other scriptural texts also).” Bhadrēśadāsa explains: “स्थानादिव्यपदेशाच्च स्थानं संस्थितिरादि येषां ते संस्थितिनियम स्तेषां वेदान्ते व्यपदेशाद् उपदेशात् परमात्मैवाऽक्ष्यन्तर्गत इत्यर्थः । तिष्ठंश्चक्षुषोऽन्तरो यं चक्षुर्न वेद यस्य चक्षुः शरीरं यश्चक्षुरन्तरो यमयत्येष आत्माऽन्तर्याम्यमृतः ॥’ (बृ.उप.-३/७/१८ (इति श्रुतिः । इत्थं स्वदिव्यब्रह्मधामस्थित एव दिव्यमनोहराकृतिः परमात्मसहजानन्दः स्वान्तर्यमनशक्त्या सर्व नियमयन तत्तत्स्थानेष्ववतिष्ठते । स चेदृग्विधोऽपि ब्रह्मरूपैर्योगिभिः स्वाभिध्याने साक्षात्क्रयत इति दृश्यत इति प्रत्यक्षवनिर्देशोऽप्युपपद्यते ॥” (BSSB 1/2/14, p.70) “He who abides in the eyes and rules it is the supreme entity. He who inhabits the eye...and controls the eye from within is

¹⁹³ BG 18/15

yourself, the internal ruler, the immortal. (BUP-3/7/18). That supreme entity also, and the words are seen that hint at direct perception, are equally true of the supreme self as yogis perceive it in their meditation. Therefore, the person in the eye is the supreme self.” This same matter is discussed in the *Upaniṣad* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya on the verse:

“ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत्” (IU 1)

“All this is inhabited by Brahman and Parabrahman, whatever that moves here in this *māyic* universe.” The Bhāṣyakāra comments that since the world and every movement within it is inhabited by Brahman and Parabrahman and none else, “they are the true owner of the entire world and every action or movement in it.”

7. *Khyāti*

Knowledge of the features of our judgments of truth and error is an important portion of epistemology in India. This is called *khyāti* and it describes the essential points for exploring the intense convulsions of experience by removing error to attain knowledge. Knowledge, generally speaking, denotes the subject of knowledge and a thing related to it. This knowledge depends on the mind and the cognitive senses of the knowing subject-topic and the surrounding in which the object is situated concerning the subject. The perception of color through the eyes affected by jaundice will see yellow color everywhere. Although there are chances of any other color. In the same way, a thing that is far away can be perceived in any other form and color. This error may be due to a particular relationship between the position of the person and the position of the thing we see. Our action of seeing things mostly affects our inference and judgment. Consequentially, our life is a result of our perception and its method and the mental background. Since each estimate is based on a pre-assumption, a false assumption will make the value of the estimates useless estimated on it.

Khyāti or theories of error are accepted in almost every ancient Vedic tradition. In

addition to this, every Vedic branch has accepted different kinds of *khyātis*. The most significant *khyātis* in Indian epistemology are 1. *Anirvacanīyakhyāti*, 2. *Akhyāti*, 3. *Ātmakhyāti*, 4. *Anyathākhyāti*, 5. *Asatkhyāti* and 6. *Satkhyāti*.

7.1 Cid-Acid Khyāti

In erroneous cognition, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School believes in *cid-acid khyāti*. It's a novel contribution to the great Vedānta tradition. The Bhāṣyakāra confirms:

भ्रान्तौ ख्यातिस्तु विज्ञेया चिदचित्ख्यातिसंज्ञका ।

प्रवृत्तिर्द्विविधा भ्रान्तेस्तस्मादेकान्तिको न हि ॥ SSSK 276॥

“We accept *cid-acid khyāti* in erroneous knowledge. Generally, every Vedic school accepts one *khyāti*, but the Bhāṣyakāra reminds us that in *Svāminārāyaṇa* Darśana we accept both *chit* and *acid-khyāti*.” However, in the *Vacanāmṛta* *Svāminārāyaṇa* did not label its name. But he accepts the erroneous knowledge regarding *cid* - sentient and *acid-māyā* and its products. All cognitions are not right knowledge. All knowledge is not self-valid in as much as it apprehends and reveals its corresponding object as it is, and it is conducive to life. This failure in it is due to *cid-acid khyāti* that includes two factors. 1. Opposite knowledge and 2. Imperfect knowledge. 1. Opposite knowledge: *Svāminārāyaṇa* describes: “The *jivātman* has a delusion in that it does not believe itself to be the *jivātman*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/44, p.111) Moreover, “*Brahma-jñāna*” can also give an expansion to the incorrect understanding that Brahman itself assumes the form of *prakṛti-puruṣa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/3, p.389). In fact, as far as opposite knowledge is concerned, it is not the *jīva*’s permanent nature; however, not a single one of these vicious natures lies within the *jīva*; the *jīva* has merely believed itself to possess them out of its own foolishness.¹⁹⁴ 3. Imperfect knowledge: Now, *Svāminārāyaṇa* describes imperfect knowledge: “If the *jivātman* engrosses in the pleasures of the external *viśaya* within that waking state inappropriately due to some misconception, then that is known as the dream

¹⁹⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/12

state within the waking state.” (Vac. Sar. 6, p.217) During the state of *rajoguṇa* and *tamoguṇa*, complete knowledge is not possible. That incomplete explanation, thus creating confusion, of entities and *viṣaya* is known as ‘*mādhyaṃ vāni*’.¹⁹⁵

7.2 Cid Khyāti

The Bhāṣyakāra explains the definition of *Cid Khyāti*:

ततो भिन्ने तु चित्तख्यातिर्वैपरीत्यं यदा भवेत् ।

यथाऽऽत्मसु जडत्वादि चेतनत्वं जडेषु च ॥SSSK 278॥

“Apart from these *māyic* products in the case of fallacious appearance in sentient entities, we concede *cid khyāti*. As sentient in inert or inert in sentient.” According to *cid-khyāti*, the error is not the non-distinction between a percept and a memory or between their contents. But, when someone perceives the sentient entity as insentient, the body as *ātman*, the *ātman* as the body, the perception of *māyic* as *amāyic* and *amāyic* as *māyic* etc. this is identified as *cid-khyāti*. Similarly, when a person perceives human traits in Parabrahman and sees Him as human, is a *bhrānta* (one with *khyāti* or erroneous knowledge). Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “What is meant by perceiving human traits in Brahman or Parabrahman? Well, it is when all of the feelings of the *antahakarana* - i.e., avarice, lust, anger, infatuation, arrogance, *matsara*, desires, cravings, etc.; and all of the characteristics of the physical body - i.e., bones, skin, faces, urine, etc., as well as birth, childhood, youth, old age, death, etc.; and all other human characteristics are perceived in Brahman and Parabrahman. A person who perceives such characteristics may appear to have a conviction of Parabrahman, but his conviction is flawed.”(Vac. Loyā 18, p.349)

Furthermore, he warns us by demonstrating the consequences of this erroneous knowledge that one who does not have such understanding would find it difficult to accept His human-like nature.¹⁹⁶ The theories of error in Indian philosophy center

¹⁹⁵ Vac. Kar. 8, Sar. 6

¹⁹⁶ Vac. Sar. 6

around mostly whether the object of error consists in the subject's cognition or in the object itself, or in both, or neither. Various schools of philosophy maintain their own perspective points regarding this and thereby develop their theory of error.

An understanding of what is true and what is untrue is an integral part of philosophical study for the acquisition of the highest knowledge. Knowledge presupposes a subject of that knowledge and also the object corresponding to it. When the subject of knowledge is Brahman and Parabrahman then there must not be any *bhrānti* (erroneous knowledge). That *bhrānti* or *khyāti* occurs when one mixes sentient into inert or inert into sentient. The Bhāṣyakāra gives an example of *cid-khyāti* by commenting on the *Gītā*-verse:

अवजानन्ति मां मूढा मानुषीं तनुमाश्रितम् ।

परं भावमजानन्तो मम भूतमहेश्वरम् ॥¹⁹⁷

“Ignorant persons despise me when I appear in human form because they do not know my transcendental nature as the great Lord of all beings (taking me for an ordinary human being).” The SB remarks: “मम परमात्मनः परं सकलेतरविलक्षणत्वात् सर्वोत्कृष्टं भावं सर्वज्ञत्वसर्वजगदुत्पत्तिप्रलयादिकर्तृत्वकालकर्ममायादिनियामकत्वादिविव्यस्वभावम्, अजानन्तः अबुध्यमानाः सन्तः मूढाः अनादिमायाप्रभावात्, स्वात्मनि ब्रह्मभाववैधुर्यात् परमात्मनि स्वसजातीयमानुषचेष्टादिदर्शनाच्च संमोहं प्राप्ताः भूतमहेश्वरं जीवेश्वरादिसकलचेतनप्रशासितारमपि मां मानुषीं मनुष्यसमचेष्टादिसन्निवेशयुतां तनुं नरविग्रहम् आश्रितं मानुषभावाधीनमितियावद् अवजानन्ति तथारूपेण ज्ञात्वा मदवज्ञां कुर्वन्ति॥” (BGSB 9/11, p.209) “Although, I Parabrahman, being the generator, sustainer and destroyer of this universe, take birth as a human on earth yet with all of my strength, divine powers and attendants. However, without the state of *brahmarūpa*, those who don't realize this esoteric truth understand the human form of Parabrahman on this earth as being exactly the same as the form of a human out of their misconception, they do not feel that there is even a slight difference between that form and their form. Instead, they disobey me.”

¹⁹⁷ BG 9/11

In this way, Brahman and Parabrahman remain divine and flawless despite manifesting on this earth in a human form. Anything they accept also becomes divine; in fact, any object, person, or place which has been graced with the contact of Brahma-Parabrahman can also be called *nīrguṇa* and divine. Sometimes Parabrahman manifests through an *avatāra*, so the *avatāra* is also divine. In addition to this, when someone perceives the sentient entity as insentient, the body as *ātman*, *ātman* as body, *māyic* as *amāyic*, *amāyic* as *māyic* etc. is also called *cid-khyāti*.

7.3 Acid Khyāti

The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra elaborates this topic in-depth in the SSS:

पञ्चीकारो भवेद् यत्र सत्कार्यतोपपद्यते ।

अचित्ख्यातिर्मता तत्र शुक्त्यादौ रजतादिके ॥SSSK 277॥

“Due to realism (*sadkārya-vāda*), and *pañcīkaraṇa* (in the process of creation five great elements have the same producer. So, on earth every *māyic* element is included in other elements in certain portion.), it is *acid-khyāti*. For example, when we perceive silver in nacre.” *Acid khyāti* is based on *māyic* products. As far as *māyic* products are concerned in erroneous results, *acid khyāti* has prevailed. Svāminārāyaṇa explains the knowledge of our *māyic* product is not false at all.

He explains: “All the worldly belongings are not false, nevertheless, due to their focused state, they are not able to see it, so they claim that all these worldly substances are false. For instance, there is no night for a person sitting in the chariot of Sūrya; but for those on earth, there is both day and night.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/39, p.100) Therefore, Parabrahman pervades everywhere so, the prescribed moral do’s and don’ts are indeed true, not false. Whosoever falsifies them will be consigned to Naraka.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 42

In this analysis, it seems from all that we read in the *Vacanāmṛta*, when we talk about *māyic* or inert objects, that; error is a case of omission. It is a case of incomplete or inadequate apprehension. The sting in error lies in the fragmentariness of the truth comprehended. The error is not caused by an additional element of commission in error. The factors which give rise to error and cognitive failures are partial comprehension and omission of many aspects of the totality of the situation. According to *acid-khyāti*, which does not exist cannot be seen. The things that remain independent, even they are interrelated with other objects. Although, truth is the relation between knowledge and an object. The fallacious knowledge of silver in the nacre is not the knowledge of something unreal which does not exist. *cid-acid khyāti*,

In the theory of *pancīkaraṇa* (quintuplication) of Taitirīya, Chāndogya, and other *Upaniṣads*. According to *pancīkaraṇa*, Give material elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air, and space (*panca-bhuta*). One of them contains its own one-half and in addition, contains a one-eighth portion of the remaining four elements (*bhutas*) in it. In perception, for instance of silver in nacre, the apprehension (cognition) of a substrate (*adhīsthāna-jñāna*) and the recollection of the silver perceived in the past elsewhere, can be described as *bhrānti-jñāna* (error). The error (*bhrānti*) thus is due to the non-awareness of the difference between these two cognitions. Svāminārāyaṇi epistemology does recognize the distinction between right knowledge (*pramiti*) and erroneous cognition (*bhrānti*). Thus the error is not a product *anirvacaniya-avidyā*. In this Vedānta, *avidyā* is not an indescribable mysterious power somehow associated with the *jīva* (the self) in the *advaitic* sense.

Svāminārāyaṇa accepts intrinsic validity and reality of all knowledge that apprehended by the knower. All knowledge is about a real object existing in the space time-cause-world. However, all knowledge is not necessarily *pramiti* (right knowledge because the knowledge that does not lead to successful activity (i.e.

fecundity/utility to a knower, i.e. the knowledge which does not work in practical life/utility is certainly to be regarded as *apramā* or error.

Now, as noted earlier, every individual self (*jivātman*) is under the sway and spell of *avidyā*, karmic potency of the past and consequent *vāsanā*-forces. Therefore, his knowledge is imperfect, partial, or half-perfect as he is still a perfection-seeking person, especially in his attempts of comprehending the highest ontological Reality (Parabrahman).

All cognitions are real. The *jnānaśakti* i.e. *dharmabhutajnāna* of the *jivātman* is subject to obscuration and contraction because of its association with *avidyā-karmavāsanās*. Consequently, during its state in *samsāra* (worldly existence) the all-pervasiveness and purity of its (*jīva*'s) *jnānaśakti* remain under stress and limitation. Therefore, the error arises. Since error occurs on account of *avidyā-karma-vāsanās* in the finite selves (*jīvātman*s), it, on the other hand, implies that the error never occurs in case of Parabrahman, Aksarabrahman and released souls (*muktas*) whose *jnānaśakti* is pure, fully expanded and omniscient. Their knowledge is always valid and their cognitions are all valid and true. Also in the case of *jīva*, there will not be any possibility of cognitive error (*bhrama/ bhrānti*) when its *jnānaśakti* becomes free from its state of obscuration and contraction. Secondly, the influence and operation of rajas and tamas is the cause of illusion (*ayathārtha-jnāna*) during *jīva*'s state of bondage. The errors, therefore, occur on account of defects in mind-sensory-motor organs or *samskāradoṣas* (*avidyā-karma-vāsanās*).

The whole problem of error may be explained briefly as follows. (i) Error is due to the obscured-contracted state of *jnānaśakti* of *jīva* during its embodied state. (ii) When the determinate features of an object are not cognized and also its difference from some other object is not cognized, the error arises. (iii) Error is a real

experience due to a real cause. Cause and effect are both real. An act of thought is real, and the object apprehended by that act also is real. So, the error is part of reality. (iv) Error arises either on account of extraneous factors of *indriyadoṣas* or on account of *samskāradoṣas*. (v) Error is known and recognized as an error, and thus corrected finally when the pragmatic test of verification in terms of successful activity-utility fails.

In connection with the popular instance of 'silver-nacre' (*śukti-rajata*), in knowledge by perception, it may be said that -the perception of silver in nacre, the knowledge that it is silver, is not untrue/unreal, though silver portion seen in it does not lead to successful activity, nor usable as silver. Here what is to be remembered is the fact the knowledge of the generic-subtle nature of silver (in nacre) is true/real. and the knowledge that there is no particular gross nature of silver (in nacre) also is true/real.

8. Conclusion of the Analysis

'*Vāda*' and '*pramāṇa*' are the two most sublime characters of the Indian philosophical system. The first is the tradition of debate, connected with arguments, sophistry, dialectical tricks, etc., and the second is of *pramāṇa* tradition, which is concerned with the means and criteria of valid empirical knowledge and correct cognition. On account of this genesis, all six *āstika* systems and Vedanta schools imbibed and gained an epistemological character, which became their remarkable characteristic. Both in the general model of reasoning and their philosophical arguments, they try to depend more or less on empirical evidence. An aspirant attempt to ascertain the accuracy and authenticity of an actual statement or declaration from what generally is called 'evidence' to what is known as 'conclusion'. After presenting both perspectives (Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta* and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya's perspective), the most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya has not made any difference from

the principles authored in the *Vacanāmṛta*. However, both have uttered different styles of presentation and assertion. Finally, the analysis confirms that both scriptures go in the same direction as the *sāmpradāyika* doctrines are concerned. Here, we present a summarized discussion that will indicate an overview of the epistemology of both scriptures.

First of all, we have to acknowledge that these all *pramā* and *pramāṇas* are for *jīvas* and *īśvaras* only, not for Brahman and Parabrahman. So, the epistemology of the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition emphasizes and covers the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman that *jīvas* and *īśvaras* must attain. Therefore, for an aspirant who wants his ultimate liberation, both ultimate entities' knowledge is indispensable. In this manner, one who attains the highest spiritual status through such a right knowledge sees the light of pure conscious-bliss in his heart, together with the formful personality of Parabrahman in its center; and he, therefore, fails to comprehend any other name or form around.

For that reason, one must know that the supreme end of philosophical knowledge is the Parabrahman- *sākṣātkāra* means the realization of Parabrahman in one's life. It consists of going from empirical sense-perception to the inner eye of reason by the *antaḥkaraṇa* and finally to direct realization by the soul. And it becomes possible when one gains divine soul sight blessed by Parabrahman himself. With this divine self sight, one can behold Parabrahman as Parabrahman with all his transcendental glory and divinity. So, the center of epistemology in both perspectives, the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* is attaining the true knowledge (*pramā*) of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

In order to obtain the true knowledge of these two entities, we should have self-knowledge (*jīva*'s and *īśvara*'s) along with the knowledge of *māyā* which obstructs

us while attaining the ultimate knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, they both add that for attaining this highest knowledge, our sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) must be pure and perfect. However, they do not emphasize any particular means of knowledge; they are not much concerned with the number of sources of knowledge; instead, they acknowledge that every means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) is valid that fulfills our ultimate goal in the realization of Brahman and Parabrahman. In addition to this, they put the grace of Parabrahman as the most significant factor in the realization of both entities.

The Bhāṣyakāra concludes it with his significant point: “यद्ध्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसिद्धान्तसाधकं तदेव सम्पूज्यं प्रमाणतयाऽन्यत्सर्वं हेयम् । ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुपसत्तिस्तयोर्वचनाऽऽचरणादिषु विश्वासो दिव्यभावश्चेत्यादीन्यपि प्रमुखानि प्रमायाः करणानीति न तानि विस्मरणीयानीति निरूपितानि प्रमाणानि ।” (SSS, p.191) All the terms in their final import refer to Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman only. When a seeker goes to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru and takes refuge under him with all faith, divinity etc. then the true knowledge is generated. This is the valid means to attain true knowledge.

¹⁹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/1

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics means beyond physics. Our Vedic seers visualized cosmic truths through intuition, and they put it in writing for the benefit of posterior generations. This is said by *Yāska*, who composed a dictionary of Vedic words. The sentences साक्षात्कृत-धर्माणः ऋषयो बभूवुः²⁰⁰ etc. reveal this fact. Indian metaphysics is of interest to the *ācāryas* because its framework of reality includes observers in a fundamental manner. Indian philosophy consists of six orthodox systems and six heterodox systems. Every system has its own metaphysics.²⁰¹

Metaphysics is related to the study of eternal ontological entities in a particular belief system.²⁰² A symposium of every Vedic thought starts with the inquiry of eternal entities. The *bhakti* traditions in India believe for individual selves to be distinct from Parabrahman.²⁰³ The names of each of these schools also exhibit this emphasis by reflecting the *darśana*'s characteristics ontological enumeration or the essential metaphysical nature, characteristics, role, and relationship between its accepted entities. In this chapter, we will analyze every metaphysical entity of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta.

The Vacanāmṛta

First, we will identify these basic entities from Svāminārāyaṇa's perspective. Svāminārāyaṇa explicitly lists the five eternal distinct ontological entities in many teachings of the *Vacanāmṛta*: "Puruṣottama Bhagavān, Akṣarabrahman, *māyā*,

²⁰⁰ *Yāska, Nirukta*, 2/11

²⁰¹ Rādhākṛṣṇana S., *Indian Philosophy*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London, 1940, p.25

²⁰² Brahmaḍarśanaḍāsa Sādhū, *Vacanāmṛta Rahashya, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2004, p.2

²⁰³ Ānandasvarupadāsa Sādhū, *Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana Eka Cintana, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2004, p.74

īśvara, and *jīva* - these five entities are eternal.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/7) “From all the Vedas, *Purāṇas*, *Itihāsa* and *Smṛti* scriptures, I have gleaned the principle that *jīva*, *māyā*, *īśvara*, Brahman and Parameśvara are all eternal.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/10) Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa accepts this unique and fundamental belief. He declared those five entities - 1. *Jīva* 2. *Īśvara* 3. *Māyā* 4. Akṣarabrahman (also Akṣara or Brahman) 5. Parabrahman (or Puruṣottama). He states this principle in other *Vacanāmṛtas* as well: (Gadh. 1/1, Sār/5, Sār/6)

THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA

Under the *Bhāṣya* of *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* ‘ह्यक्षरात्परतः परः’²⁰⁴, Bhadreśadāsa writes: “जीवेश्वरमायाब्रह्मरूपमुक्तादिसर्वेभ्यः परभूताद् ... अक्षरात्.... परभूतः ... परमात्मा ।” (MUSB 2/1/2, p. 259)²⁰⁵ In the 15th canto of *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, when Śrī Kṛṣṇa initiates a discussion on the entities, the Bhāṣyakāra indisputably extrapolates the knowledge of five entities. द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च । क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते ॥ (BG 15/16)²⁰⁶ There are two categories of beings, the *kṣara* (fallible) and the Akṣara (infallible). All the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are constituted in the *kṣara*. Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa, the Bhāṣyakāra, answers to the question that how can animate entities like the *jīva* and *īśvara* be constituted in the *kṣara*: “इदानीं वा पूर्व वा यदा कदापि क्षरणस्वभावाऽचित्संसर्गप्राप्तत्वात् क्षर इति शब्दाभिलष्यानि” (BGSB 15/16, p.314)²⁰⁷

Interestingly, Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa’s answer is in consonance with the doctrine of Svāminārāyaṇa, as Svāminārāyaṇa himself says in the *Vacanāmṛta* that infinite *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are pervaded by *māyā* and have infinite births. Only by associating themselves with Brahman and Parabrahman, they attain liberation.²⁰⁸ Now, there arises a question that why Akṣara is called *Kūṭastha*. All preceding *ācāryas* have

²⁰⁴ *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 2/1/2, 112 *Upaniṣad*, 2007, S. Joṣī, Bimalī, Trivedī, Parimala Publication, Delhi.

²⁰⁵ Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya, *Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2009.

²⁰⁶ *Bhagavad-Gītā*, Gītā Press, Gorakhpura, 2014.

²⁰⁷ 15/16, *Gītā* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya, 2009.

²⁰⁸ Vach. Gh. III-10, *Ibid*.

defined *kūṭastha* as either Parabrahman or *māyā* or *śakti*. However, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra defines *kūṭastha* Akṣara as ‘Brahman’. This is because his interpretation is in sheer consonance with what Svāminārāyaṇa talks about in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Svāminārāyaṇa clearly delineates that Brahman and Parabrahman transcend *māyā*. Moreover, in addition to that, he also avers that Brahman and Parabrahman are two distinct entities and not one unlike what many of his predecessors have advocated.²⁰⁹ Also, it can be argued that in *Bhagavad Gītā* itself, the word *kūṭastha* does not mean Parabrahman. This is because, in the very next *śloka*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa demonstrates that Puruṣottama Parabrahman is distinct from Akṣara. He deciphers:

उत्तमः पुरुषस्त्वन्यः परमात्मेत्युदाहृतः ।

यो लोकत्रयमाविश्य बिभर्त्यव्यय ईश्वरः ॥ (BG 15/17)

“The supreme entity is entirely distinct and is identified as Paramātmān. He pervades three abodes remains unchangeable God. Therefore, just as Parabrahman has been portrayed distinctly from the *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, and Brahman in the *Vacanāmṛta*, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra, too, writes: “अक्षराद् अपि पूर्वोक्तसर्वविधबद्धमुक्तजीवेश्वरमायादिभ्योऽपि सदैवऽत्यन्तोत्कृष्टात् साक्षादक्षर -ब्रह्मणोऽपि उत्तमः उत्कृष्टः ।” (BGSB 15/18, p. 316)²¹⁰

In the same manner, he asserts in the *Brahmasūtra*: “तथापि जीवेश्वरमायातन्मुक्तादिसर्वपरतः तस्मात् केवलं परात्मन एव परत्वात् तदानन्दपुरस्कारेण तदक्षरादिसर्वसमुत्कृष्टपरमात्मसहजनन्दानन्दं निरूपयितुं स उदाहृतः।” (BSSB 1/1/14, p. 40) “It is clear that even though Akṣara is blissful and transcends *māyā*, has more bliss compare to *jīva*, *īśvara*, and *māyā*. But Brahman is still not as blissful as Parabrahman. Parabrahman is supreme to all.” Here he elaborates the ultimate bliss of Parabrahman then all lower three entities. Moreover, in the BSSB, Bhadrēśadāsa clinched this principle of “*Tattva pañcaka*” throughout the

²⁰⁹ Vach. Gh. II-3, *ibid*.

²¹⁰ *Gītā* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya, 15.18

commentary. At the very starting point (BSSB 1/1/1, p.2), in the middle (BSSB 1/4/137, p.2), and at the last page of the commentary (BSSB 4/4/4, p.432). About this very “*Tattva pañcaka*”, Sādhū Bhadrēśādāsa also corroborates in the third *kārikā* of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Siddhānta Sudhā*, the *Vādagrantha*:

जीवस्तथेश्वरो माया ब्रह्म परमब्रह्म च ।

नित्याः सत्याः सदैवेते मिथो भिन्नाः स्वरूपतः ॥ SSSK 3 ॥²¹¹

“All five of these entities- *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman and Parabrahman are indeed real (*satya*) and always distinct among themselves.” To further emphasize, Svāminārāyaṇa mentions in the *Vedarasa*: “Some claim that *jīvas* and *māyā* are imaginary (*kalpita*). But O *Paramahamsas*! The *jīva* is real, *māyā* is real, *īśvara* is real, Brahman is real, and Parabrahman real.” (VR/177) Hence, this chapter discusses these eternal five ontological entities according to Svāminārāyaṇa and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya’s perspective. Now we will analyze each entity in detail.

1. JĪVA

The Bhāṣyakāra presents an appropriate definition of the *jīva*:

जीवयति स्वदेहं यो जीवति च स्वयं यतः।

तस्माद्धि चेतनाऽऽत्माऽयं जीव इति प्रकीर्तितः॥ SSSK 314 ॥

“Because this sentient *ātman* itself lives and enables the body to live, it is called the *jīva*.” In response to the question, who is the most ignorant among all ignorant persons? Svāminārāyaṇa explains that the *jīva* resides in the body, and with the help of it, the *jīva* perceives forms as beautiful and ugly, perceives childhood, youth, and old age, and perceives varieties of names and forms around; but does not perceive itself. Such a person (*jīva*) is the most ignorant among all ignorant. Similarly, he enjoys a great variety of forms through eyes, tastes through the tongue, smells through the nose, and so on; but does not turn inward to enjoy the happiness of his own self, nor does he make an attempt to know one’s own essential nature. He,

²¹¹ *Svāminārāyaṇa Siddhānta Sudhā Kārikā -3, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2017

therefore, is the most ignorant among all ignorant persons. Now, since it is a *prima facie* duty of man to know the nature of self (*jivātman*) (Know Thyself), let us turn to analyze the concept of self in Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta. *Jivā* or soul is the finite individual self. It is a spiritual substance. It is extremely subtle and imperceptible, and hence, regarded as atomic in size. It resides in the body of an organism. It is the very principle of life and its activities. The self is an eternal, indivisible, single, partless entity.

The self is not subject to production and destruction. It was never created, nor can it ever be destroyed, and hence, at the annihilation of the body, the self is not annihilated. Consciousness is the very essence of the self (*jivātman*), while knowledge (cognition) is its essential inseparable quality. The self, under its attributive knowledge, pervades the whole body. Therefore, the self is the real knower, enjoyer, and doer of everything.

However, in the state of worldly existence, the self's knowledge and bliss are in a state of contraction or obscuration. The self (*jivātman*) is beginningless bound by the fetters of *avidya-karma* (ignorance-actions). The gross (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*), and causal (Limp) are the three bodies; while the waking (*jāgrata*), dreaming (*svapna*), and sleeping (*susupti*) are the three states of the *jīva*. The *Upaniṣads* proclaim that *ātman* that is bereft of sin, is to be searched for and is to be realized. In Svāminārāyaṇa's opinion, that knowledge is the true knowledge, which is the knowledge of the field and the field-knower. Through the eyes of knowledge, one ought to know the distinction between the field and field-knower.

1.1 Three Bodies and Three States of the *Jīva*

The *jīva* has three types of bodies: *sthūla deha*, *sūkṣma deha*, and *kāraṇa deha*. Within these three states of varying awareness, it experiences the fruits of its

karmas.²¹² Bhadreśadāsa demonstrates these three bodies and states while commenting on the *mantra*: “अयमात्मा ब्रह्म” he deciphers: “अयं शरीरस्थो हि आत्मा स्थूलसूक्ष्मकारणेतदेतन्त्रयभावाभिघातैः जाग्रत्स्वप्नसुषुप्तीत्यवस्थात्रयभावाभिघातैश्च अभिभूय स्यादेव ।” (MaUSB 1/2, p.313). “The *ātman* which resides in the body is affected by its three bodies: *sthūla deha*, *sūkṣma deha*, and *kāraṇa deha*, and also with three states of it: *jāgrata avasthā*, *svapna avasthā*, and *suṣupti avasthā*.”

The GSB also sheds light while perceiving the sorrowful mind and restless features of Arjuna: “स्थूलसूक्ष्मकारणेतदेतन्त्रयभावान् पार्थस्य ददर्श भगवान्” (GSB 2/1, p.18), Moreover the BSSB highlights the “three states of the *ātman*” in the *Sandhyādhikaraṇa*: “स्वप्नसुषुप्त्याद्यात्मावस्थाः” (BSSB *Sandhyādhikaraṇa* 3/2/1, p.284) Here is the simple analysis of these three bodies and states of the *jīva*.

स्थूलमेकं तथा सूक्ष्मं तृतीयं कारणं मतम्।

तस्य त्रीणि शरीराणि यद्वन्धात् संसृतिं गतः ॥ SSSK 322 ॥

“The physical (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*) and causal (*kāraṇa*) are recognized as the *jīva*’s three bodies. The bonds of these bodies cause the self to be reborn after death.” The three states are as follows:

जागरणं तथा स्वप्नः सुषुप्तिश्चेति बुध्यते।

बद्धानां न तु मुक्तानां तेषां ब्रह्मणि संस्थितेः॥ SSSK 329 ॥

Waking (*jāgrata*), dream (*svapna*), and deep sleep (*suṣupti*) are the *jīva*’s three states. These states apply to bound souls. However, they do not apply to released souls, as such souls have attained oneness with Akṣarabrahman.

1. The waking state (*jāgrata avasthā*)- In this state, the body, all senses, and the internal mind are all attentive and remain in action all the time. (MaUSB 2/1, p.314; Sār. 6).

²¹² Vac. Gadh. 1/56, Sār. 6

2. The dream state (*svapna avasthā*)- Only the mind is active and alert, whereas the body and all senses are latent. (MaUSB 2/2, p.315; Sār. 6).
3. The deep sleep state (*susupti avasthā*)- Even the mind becomes inactive; it is characterized by complete sleep. (MaUSB 2/3, p.316; Sār. 6).

We can see the influence of *māyā* on each state correspondingly. (MaUSB 2/1-3, pp.314-316; Sār. 6).

Only when an aspirant gets rid of these three bodies and states, he becomes *brahmarūpa* and go to the abode of Parabrahman. Bhadreśadāsa elucidates in the *Gītā Bhāṣya* while commenting on the verse ‘*Brahmabhūtaḥ prasannātmā...*’ “देहावस्थात्रयसमतिक्रमणलभ्यां ब्रह्मरूपतां प्राप्तः।” (BGSB 18/54, p.360) “By transgressing the three bodies, states, and *guṇas*, one attains the *Brāhmika* state.” The *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad* calls it the “चतुर्थम्” (MaU 2/5) the fourth state.²¹³ It should be noted, that physical (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣma*) and causal (*kāraṇa*) bodies are made of *māyā*.

1.2 Different from the Body

Svāminārāyaṇa unpacks the eternal truth in the *Vacanāmṛta* that the *jīva* and the body are absolutely different. It is the psycho-physical body that has name and form, and is the product of matter (*māyā*), but not the self. The self is not an appearance of one universal *ātman*, due to *avidya* (nescience); nor is the body an appearance or unreality from any standpoint. The body is subject to birth, growth, change, decay, disease, and death, while the self is the identical unchanging imperishable principle behind and beyond it. The body is real, but it is inferior to the soul, and totally dependent on it. The body is ephemeral and perishable. A man in worldly existence is embodied by a psycho-physical perimeter. No property of body can be attributed to self, nor any property of self be ever attributed to the body. During his life in *samsāra*, his knowledge and bliss are in a state of

²¹³ तूर्याऽवस्था स्थितिर्ब्राह्मी मुक्तिरूपा प्रकीर्तिता। जीवतोऽपि भवेल्लभ्या जाग्रदादित्रयात् परा ॥331॥

obscuration. The consciousness or knowledge and bliss are the essential inseparable attributes of the soul (*ātman*).

The very existence and activity of the body are purely for the sake of the soul (self). The body is an instrument for the realization of the soul's end. As the psycho-physical body is controlled and governed by the soul from within, so is the individual soul ruled and governed by the Supreme Soul Parabrahman from within. The soul is like the king (the ruler) within, who rules and governs the whole body together with senses, *antaḥkaraṇa*, etc. A soul is dependent on God, who alone is absolutely independent. In other words, the souls are the body of God, while God is the owner (*śarīrī*) of that body. God is the Inner Self (the witness of the self (*jivātman*)).²¹⁴

The CUSB echoes in the same way while commenting on the *mantra*:

मघवन्मर्त्यं वा इदं शरीरमात्तं मृत्युना,
तदस्यामृतस्याशरीरस्यात्मनोऽधिष्ठानम् ॥

“एवं नश्वरस्य जडस्य देहस्य चेतनदात्मतोत्यन्तविलक्षणत्वेऽपि यस्य नैव निवृत्तो देहाभावस्तस्य लौकिकद्वन्द्वान्तः पातित्वम्” (CUSB 8/12/1, p. 384) “Here, Prajāpati preaches Indra that this body is perishable. Its death is inevitable. It is just a temporary place of residence for the *ātman*. The *ātman* is eternal despite the fact that it resided in the body. It is indestructible. Therefore, as long as you believe yourself to be the body you will have feelings of mundane misery and happiness. Once the belief that you are the body subsides and you truly realize the *ātman*, then mundane misery and happiness will no longer affect you.” The BGSB also explores it in this way: “नित्यनिर्विकारत्वदेहविलक्षणत्वादिगुणविशिष्टतया” (BGSB 2/25, p.32) “The *jīva* is eternally immutable and distinct from the qualities of the body.” “एवमिहः षड्विकारा जडानुलम्बाः चेतनात्मनि प्रतिषिद्धा” (BGSB 2/20, p.30) “In this way, six inert mutable qualities are prohibited in the sentient *ātman*.” Therefore, the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the

²¹⁴ Vac. Sār. 1, p.203

Vacanāmṛta, both scriptures assert that the body is completely distinct from the *jīva*.

1.3 Ātman-Body Relation

Ātman is not merely consciousness, but the support and substratum of knowledge or consciousness. It is the metaphysical ego (i.e. I-sense). It is not just knowledge or cognition, but the locus of knowledge it is. The knowledge or cognition is its attribute (*dharma*). This meaning is explicitly brought out in BS (2/3/29).

We discussed that the *jīva* is different from the body, mind, and all senses. Now we highlight the relationship of both. Svāminārāyaṇa presents this relationship in the *Vacanāmṛta*. “The *jīva* is the king of the kingdom in the form of this body”? (Gadh. 2/12). The body is dependent on the *ātman*.

However, according to the *Garuda Puraṇa*, the seat of the *jivātman* keeps shifting as per changes in the conditions, as follows. During the waking condition, *jivātman* resides in/operates through eyes, during dreaming condition *jivātman* resides in/operates through the throat, during the deep sleep condition, the *jivātman* resides in/operates through the heart; and in the highest-fourth state of realization, the *jivātman* resides in/operates through the head (the Central Nervous System - *Sahasra-cakra of brahmarandhra*).

The BGSB expresses: “Human body is called the ‘क्षेत्रम्’ or field. One who knows the field or ‘क्षेत्रज्ञः’ is called the *ātman*. (BGSB 13/1, p.276) The three bodies could also be labeled as mere instruments. Just as the soil cannot do without a potter. But we should keep it in mind that even without the help of soil a potter can not make any pot. Similarly, with the help of the body *ātman* can work. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra explores the relationship between them:

देहस्थो देहभिन्नोऽयं देहेन्द्रियप्रकाशकः।

देहादेस्तं विना नैव स्वकार्येषु प्रवर्तनम् ॥ SSSK 341॥

“The *jīva* is distinct from the body, despite dwelling in it. It illuminates the body and senses. Neither the body nor the senses can engage in their respective tasks in its absence.”

1.4 The Nature and Form of the *Jīva*?

Svāminārāyaṇa explains the nature of the *jīva* in detail. His succinct exposition serves as an important platform to understand further details. Svāminārāyaṇa explores: “The *jīva* is uncuttable, impermeable, immortal, formed of consciousness, and the size of an atom? (*aṇu*)...It pervades the entire body from head to toe yet is distinct from it. Such is the nature of the *jīva*.” (Vac. Jet. 2)

Along with this, the *jīva* is eternal, imperishable, immutable, and individual. (Vac. Gadh. 3/39, 3/4). Svāminārāyaṇa also recapitulates the fine feature of the *jīva* where he mentions the *anādi* form of the *jīva*, tracking its existence back to beyond the re-organization of each universe after the state of termination. Using another analogy, he elucidates in the Vac. Gadh 3/10 that the *jīvas* remain in *māyā* after *pralaya*. In differentiating the *jīva* from its three *māyic* bodies and its three states born of the three *māyic* characteristics, Svāminārāyaṇa wishes to accentuate the *jīva*, in its pure form, without *māyic* faults. As a matter of fact, a significant and striking attribute of the *jīva* is that it is always *śuddha* (pure). For example - “In fact, not a single one of these vicious natures lies within the *jīva*.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/12)

As accurate as this is, though, the *jīva*’s ignorance or contrary knowledge about its true nature is equally real and the cause of eternal pain. Thus, despite being significantly pure in nature, this *māyā* (as the form of ignorance) propels the *jīva* through the relentless cycle of births and deaths, necessitating it to be enlightened and liberated. Again, juxtaposing the self with that which it is not. He explains: “After acquiring knowledge of the *ātman* and the perfect knowledge of Parabrahman’s nature, one should contemplate, ‘I am the *ātman*, characterized by

eternal existence (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*) and bliss (*ānanda*), whereas the body and the *brahmāṇḍa* are *māyic* and perishable. How can they compare to me?” (Vac. Gadh. 1/73)²¹⁵

Svāminārāyaṇa usually says that the *jīva* is the ‘knower’, and related to the body. The world is knowable. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya also confirms it. Bhadreśadāsa comments on the second chapter of the *Gītā* by just touching the basic verses: “अभ्यासनयेन आत्मस्वरूपं दृढयति” (BGSB 2/20) “The *Gītā* invariably consolidates the nature and form of the *ātman*.” He further explains that *ātman* remains forever. It has no birth and death. It is endless, unprecedented yet older than the oldest, and ageless. The *ātman* is not eliminated when the *deha* perishes. (*Gītā* 2/20). In the same way, KUSB explores: “त्रिविधशरीरस्थोऽप्ययं नित्यत्वन्निर्विकारत्वाद् अति सुक्ष्मत्वाच्च न शरीरनाशेऽपि नश्यति इति भावः” (KUSB 2/18, p.115)

“The *ātman*, which resides within the three bodies, never perishes even though the body dies. It is because of its eternal immutability and the supreme subtleness.” If the *jīva* is unborn and undying, why does the Veda say, “The Creator Created *jīvas*”? (Yajur Veda 8/2/2) The answer is: the *jīvas* were lying dormant in the subtle seed-like state in the *māyā* before creation. They were resting in the body of Parabrahman. So, birth means becoming embodied, and death means getting disembodied. Thus, origination means getting associated with the gross form of the psycho-physical body, and destruction means getting dissociated from the same psycho-physical body. Consequently,

²¹⁵ Svāminārāyaṇa also iterates the *jīva* as being *sat*, '*cit*' and '*ananda*' by using these terms and their synonyms) separately in several other sermons: • *satya*' and '*sattārūpa*': Vac. Gadh. 1.7, Gadh. 1.14, Gadh. 1.16, Gadh.1.47, Loyā.17, Gadh. 2.57, Gadh. 2.66, Gadh. 3.3, Gadh. 3.22, Gadh. 3.33, Gadh. 3.39 '*caityana*' and '*caitanyarūpa*': Vac. Gadh. 1.23, Sār.i, Sār.4, Sār.10, Sār.12, Loyā.7, Loyā.18, Pan.3, Gadh. 2.2, Gadh. 2.17, Gadh. 2.20, Gadh. 2.22, Gadh. 2.55, Gadh. 2.60, Gadh. 2.66, Var.4, Gadh. 3.2, Gadh. 3.3, Gadh. 3.19, Gadh. 3.22, Gadh. 3.27, Jet.2, Jet.3. '*ānandarūpa*' and '*sukharūpa*': Vac. Sār.1, Sār.12, Kār.3, Loyā.10

there is development or *vikāsa* and contraction or *saṅkoca* of knowledge in the two states respectively.

Thus, the *jīva* is a sentient entity. Bhadreśadāsa discloses it in the PUSB:

“एष हि द्रष्टा स्प्रष्टा श्रोता घ्राता रसयिता मन्ता बोद्धा चक्षुरादिज्ञानेन्द्रियमनआद्यन्तः

करणजन्यदर्शनमननादिकर्ता विज्ञानात्मा पुरुषः” (PUSB 4/9, p.211)

“The *ātman* itself becomes the viewer of the scenes, listens to the discussions of others’, smells the fragrances, enjoys the tastes, contemplates, knows and does a variety of other actions which are executed by external senses or inner senses.” The BSSB also speaks of *jīva*’s *jñānatṛtva* and *kartṛtva*:

“जीवात्मेश्वरात्मा च ज्ञः ज्ञातापि, न ज्ञानमात्रम् ... इत्थमात्मनो ज्ञातृत्वे सिद्धे” (BSSB 2/3/19, p.233) “

The *jīva* is not only full of knowledge but also the knower. Thus, the *jīva* is proved as a knower.” *Ātman* is not merely *sat* (IU 15) and consciousness (TUSB 2/5/1), but the support and substratum of knowledge or consciousness (BGSB 13/1). It is the metaphysical ego (I sense or *ahaṁtā*). It is not just knowledge or cognition, but it is the locus of knowledge. Knowledge or cognition is its attribute (*dharma*). This meaning is elaborately brought out in BSSB 2/3/29-32. It is noteworthy that, without the acceptance of the knowing *jīva* as *jñātā*, the knower as the permanent identical self, the problem of memory and recognition cannot be expounded. Amid the changing experiences, the experiencer is the same.

1.5 Multiplicity and Atomicity

The self’s individuality is mentioned here. It is noteworthy that all *jīvas* are ontologically the same, but they are not one entity. The *Vacanāmṛta* declares its multiplicity: “In addition, when all of those *brahmānds* are destroyed, all other *jīvas* lie dormant within *māyā*, whereas the devotees of Parabrahman attain the abode of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/12) Svāminārāyaṇa also refers to this fact in many *Vacanāmṛtas* (Vac. Var.6, Gadh. 3/10, and Gadh. 3/39). In the same way, the multiplicity of *jīvas* and *īśvaras* is described by the Bhāṣyakāra as well. In his

commentary of KU, he elucidates: “नित्यो नित्यानां चेतनश्च चेतनानाम् इति बहुवचनेन बहुत्वख्यापनाज्जीवेश्वराणां परस्परं च स्वरूपभेदः प्रस्थापितः” (KUSB 5/13, p.155).

At many places, the scriptures use plural nouns and pronouns:

“He (Akṣarabrahman) is the one eternal self among many eternal selves”..(SU 6/13)

“That from which these beings are born...” (TU 3/1/1)

“From that, all these beings are born ...” (PU 1/14)

“... Whereas all beings are *kṣara*.” (BG 15/16)

1.6 Atomic size

Schools of Vedanta have traditionally advocated and defended one of three sizes for the individual soul. The *jīva* has its locus specifically in the heart. The psycho-physical body, as such is inert and insentient, but it appears conscious or sentient because *jīva* as the conscious-sentient dam by its attributive-consciousness pervades the whole body from top to bottom, and thus on account of the sentience of the *jīva*, the sentiency of the body is felt, and also it appears indistinct from the body. The *jivātman* is extremely subtle and finer, of atomic size, yes it is extremely subtle like an atom, and is of the nature of consciousness; bliss. And so do the *Śrutis* say: "The extremely subtle like an atom the self is, and ought to be known by thought. A hundredth part of the point of a hair is subdivided into a hundredfold, and one part of that later is the size of an ātman. It is as sharp and subtle pointed, as the point of an arrow. The seat of the *jīva* is our heart, the heart composed of fivefold material elements. The *Upaniṣads* are also following the same tradition. For example, the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* states: “Know by thought this atomic *ātman* being immeasurably small in size, in which the vital breath enters fivefold.” (MU 3/1/9). Bhadreśadāsa also consolidates this doctrine and argues एषोणुरात्मेत्यात्मनोऽणुत्वस्य साक्षात्श्रवणाद् आत्मनो विभुत्वं वा मध्यमपरिमाणत्वं वदन्तः श्रुतिमतप्रतिभटा इति विज्ञायते ॥ (MUSB 3/1/9, p.290) “As the *Śruti* clearly states the *aṇuparimāṇa* (like an atom) of the *jīva*, so those who insist that *jīva* is

either *vibhuparimāṇa* (all-pervading) or *madhyamparimāṇa* (as the size of the particular body) are going right conflicting from the path of the Vedic *Śrutis*.”

The *Śvetāśvetara Upaniṣad* analogizes: “It is as fine as the tip of a goad.” (SU 5/8) The exceedingly subtle self (*ātman*) inhabits in the heart of the our body (PU 3/6, BU 4/3/7, Vac. Kār.12, Gadh. 2/34, Gadh. 3/4, Loyā. 15). Bhadreśadāsa also cites these facts from BS 2/3/22, where he argues that the all-pervasive *atman* term is stated in CU 3/14/2, 3 and BU 4/4/25 refers to Parabrahman, not the individual soul. Therefore, we conclude by saying that the individual self (*jīva* or *ātman*) is of atomic size.

1.7 Dependency

We discussed that the *jīva* is a knower, agent, and enjoyer of all bodily actions. Even though it acts like a king and rules the body, Svāminārāyaṇa ardently states: “Parabrahman is the very life and vital force of all *jīvas*. Without him, those *jīvas* are incapable of doing anything or enjoying anything.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/37). Bhadreśadāsa mentions this fact and highlights it in his commentary of KeU 1/2, which narrates Parabrahman as: “The ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the tongue of the tongue, the vital breath of the vital breath, the eye of the eye.” And he concludes, “तत्तत्क्रियासामर्थ्यप्रदाता अक्षराधिपतिः वेदादिशास्त्रेषु प्रसिद्धः” (KeUSB 1/2, p.34) “The Vedas and other scriptures echo that Parabrahman, who is the lord of Akshardhām, gives power to each self to perform its action.” Bhadreśadāsa explores further: “The ears can only hear because it is Parabrahman who has empowered them with the capacity of hearing. The mind can only think and perceive because Parabrahman has infused it with the power of thinking and perception. The body is enlivened not by the breath alone, but by Parabrahman who breathes life into that vital breath.” Bhadreśadāsa explores that Parabrahman gives the power to all our inner and outer faculties so they can engage in their appointed works. The body and all its entities become mere *jīva*’s instruments. Moreover, even the *jīva* cannot change its state without the wish

and power (*jñānaśakti*, *icchāśakti*, and *kriyāśakti*) of Parabrahman (Svāminārāyaṇa has also mentioned it in Vac. Gadh. 1/65).” As mentioned in the SSS:

इच्छाशक्तिः पराल्लब्धा ज्ञानशक्तिस्तथैव च।

क्रियाशक्तिः पराल्लब्धा जीवेन कृपया प्रभोः ॥ SSSK 334॥

“By Parabrahman’s grace, the *jīva* acquires the ability to desire, know and act. In this way the *jīva* is so powerful in knowing, doing, and enjoying the objects yet it cannot do it independently. By the eternal permission of Parabrahman, it can function properly. (AUSB 3/1, BSSB 2/3/19-32, 2/3/33-40)

1.8 Is the *Jīva* a Component (*Aṃśa*) of Parabrahman?

Svāminārāyaṇa states: “Therefore, *jīvas* residing in *māyā*; are also eternal, and they are not components of Parabrahman” (Vac. Gadh. 3/10, p.600) then what about the *Gītā*’s revelation: “ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनो” (*Gītā* 15/7). Svāminārāyaṇa explains in the *Vacanāmṛta* that *jīvas* who are called *aṃśas* of Parabrahman resist and collect their five *indriyas* and mind from the consumption of the senses and keep them suppressed. (Gadh. 2/8). This is the matter of debate discussion in the BS 2/3/43 and 2/3/63 (*Aṃśadhikāraṇa*), where Bhadreśadāsa argues that Parabrahman becomes in parts is the principle that contradicts *śāstrika* doctrines that show Parabrahman to be *akhaṇḍa*, *niraṃśa*, and *niravayava*. As a matter of fact, these texts reveal that the *jīvas* as being the *aṃśa* of Parabrahman means those *jīvas* are devotees of Parabrahman. They are called *aṃśas* to mention the virtue of *jīvas* attained from Parabrahman. This is indeed followed by the Bhāṣyakāra while commenting on the verse 15/7 of the *Gītā*. In this manner, the *jīva* is totally dependent on Parabrahman but by Parabrahman’s wish, the *jīva* possesses few rights to do its activities allowed by Him. in the conclusion we can say that the *jīva* is not entirely subordinate nor a captivated das. It has the freedom to make, unmake and remake its *karmas*, which are also provided by the immense grace of Parabrahman.

2. ĪŚVARA

The Bhāṣyakāra states:

ऐश्वर्यादीश्वरः प्रोक्तो जीवाद्भिन्नः स्वरूपतः ।

ज्ञानं ज्ञाता च नित्यश्च मायाबद्धोस्त्यनादितः ॥ SSSK 347 ॥

“The *īśvarātman* is different from the *jīvātmān*. It is known as *īśvara* due to its significant powers. It embodies wisdom and is the knower. It is eternal and has always been bound by *māyā*.” The word ‘*īśvara*’ as such signifies a separate ontological principle, a class of beings higher than *jīvas*, but unquestionably subservient to Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.²¹⁶ One basic fact of Svāminārāyaṇa School is that we should keep it our mind that by the term ‘*īśvara*’ one should not be misguided with Parabrahman or Paramātman. It is a distinct eternal entity. The *īśvara* has the characteristics that match with the *jīva*, yet it possesses more power and valor than the *jīva*. Therefore whatever has been written about the *jīva*, to some extent it also stands for *īśvara*.

Īśvara is a distinct reality. It refers to the whole class of cosmic selves who are engaged in the evolution and care (administration) of the universes. *Īśvaras* are a separate class of reality, which stands higher than *jīvas* (individual selves), but is subservient to *māyā*, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman. *Īśvaras* too are absolutely dependent on Parabrahman. They too are ruled, controlled, and supported by Parabrahman. Thus *īśvaras* are the gods of lower-order headed by the Supreme Godhead Parabrahma-Puruṣottama.

The need to postulate a distinct category of *īśvara* in Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta is well-explicated. *Īśvara* as each world’s creator, sustainer, and destroyer. They are too beginningless-eternal. *Īśvaras* (cosmic selves) have their atomic size as well, though of course they are endowed with *aiśvarya* (power-opulence) as a

²¹⁶ SSSK 348

property-specific to them. In addition, their *jnāna-śakti* is much expanded to cover the knowledge of the whole world to which they are attached.

The *īśvara* has the quality of *sat, cid, ānanda* (existence-consciousness-bliss) manifest in a much higher degree (quantum) than the *jīvas*. The power, strength, capacity, life-span, and knowledge of *īśvara* are comparatively far more wide and excellent than the *jīvas*. (*avidyā-karma*) that limit and bind the *jīvas*. They are bound (conditioned) by the adjuncts of *māyā*. The Inner Self and the Witness in all *īśvaras* is Parabrahman as the *Antaryami Ātman*. He is their supporter, controller, and the source of power and strength in them.

2.1 Common Characteristics of *Jīvas* and *Īśvaras*

Svāminārāyaṇa has described both the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* often together. “That Virāṭa Puruṣa is just like this *jīva*, and his actions are also similar to that of the *jīva*.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p.459). Moreover, in Vac. Gadh 1/45, Svāminārāyaṇa explains how Parabrahman is the controller of all *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. He also mentions the fruits of *karmas* of all *jīvas* and *īśvaras* that are granted according to their *karmas*. The Bhāṣyakāra also highlights the same fact: “तत्सर्गनिबन्धनसंसरणस्वभावाप्तबद्धजीवेश्वरसमूहमिश्रितं...जगत् परेण ब्रह्मणा अक्षरब्रह्मणा च वास्यम्” (IUSB 1, p.6) “Brahman and Parabrahman pervade the world which is full of *jīvas* and *īśvaras* who are bound by *māyic* qualities such as the following the circle of life and death.” Moreover, he clears the category of devas: “जीवेश्वरकोटिगता देवाः” (IUSB 4, p.12) “Devas fall in the *īśvara* category.” In addition, Parabrahman creates abodes; therefore, they can have a relish of the fruits of their *karmas*.”

Like the *jīva*, the *īśvaras* also have three bodies which are the fragments of the creation of the world. “उत्पत्तिरिह तत्तज्जीवेश्वरचेतनानुष्ठितकर्मानुसृततत्तत्फलोपभोगानुकूल-तत्तल्लोकपालादिसर्जनम्” (BSSB 1/1/2, p.13) “Here creation means the production of the various *lokas*

(abodes) and commodities for enjoyment within those abodes. These all are created according to *jīvas* and *īśvaras'* *karmas*.” The *īśvaras* are ontologically metaphysically distinct from all four entities accepted in the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta. Although *īśvara* as an eternal entity, is greater than *jīvas* but is still in the clutch of *māyā* and most inferior to Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.²¹⁷ They are also eternal entities. “न प्रलये जीवेश्वरात्मनो नश्यन्ति न वा सर्गे नूतना उत्पद्यन्ते इति सिद्धम्” (BSSB 2/3/18, p.232). “Even after the dissolution of each *brahmāṇḍa*, they exist in a dormant state within *māyā* until called again to activity in the next round of cyclic creation.” As mentioned: “जनिमृतिप्रवाहे संसरन्ति ते जना बद्धा जीवेश्वराः” (IUSB 3, p.11) “*Jīvas* and *īśvaras* are eternally bound by *māyā* and are trapped in the circle of life and death.”

By the power of Parabrahman, they can indulge in various enjoyment and wish to do several activities,²¹⁸ even while being wholly dependent on him (and Akṣarabrahman). “जीवेश्वरकर्तृत्वं न स्वातन्त्र्येण अपि तु परात् सहजानन्दपरमात्मनः तन्नित्येच्छया अक्षरब्रह्मणश्चैव संभवति ।” (BSSB 2/3/41, p.244) “*Jīvas* and *īśvaras* are capable of doing action only by the grace of Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.” Moreover, like *jīvas*, *īśvaras* are also countless बद्धजीवेश्वरसमूहमिश्रितं...जगत् (IUSB 1, p.6) in number and atomic in individual size. “अणुपरिमाण एव न तु विभुः” (BSSB 2/3/20, p.233).

2.2 Distinction

After a brief explanation of the similarities to *jīvas*, we now concentrate on the distinct characteristics of the form, function, and nature of *īśvaras*. Svāminārāyaṇa states: “The five *bhūtas* resting in the body of *īśvaras* are known as *mahabhūtas* and those *bhūtas* sustain the bodies of all *jīvas*. On the other hand, the five *bhūtas* in the body of the *jīvas* are minor and are incompetent in sustaining others. Also, the *jīvas* possesses limited knowledge compared to the *īśvaras*, who are all-knowing.

²¹⁷ SSSK 348

²¹⁸ BSSB 2/3/19, p.233, BSSB 2/3/33, p.240

One should learn such a method of interpretation so that the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are not understood to be equal to each other.”(Vac. Pan. 2, p.356). Thus, they both are ontologically different entities.

Īśvara’s form

(*Vacanāmṛta* Sār. 6, AUSB 1/1/2 and the SSSK 350-51)

Body	State	Name	Examples
Virāṭa	Utpatti	Vairāja	Brahmā
Sūtrātmā	Sthiti	Hiraṇyagarbha	Viṣṇu
<i>Avyākṛta</i>	<i>Pralay</i>	<i>Īśvara</i>	Śiva etc.

Three bodies and three states are the same in *jīvas*, *īśvaras* according to their power. As a result, they too, have to do spiritual endeavors for emancipation. They also need to attain *Brahmavidyā* for final liberation. Now, Svāminārāyaṇa explains the lifespan of the *īśvaras*: “The lifespan of that Virāṭa Puruṣa (*īśvara*) is two *parārdhas* (i.e., 2×10^7 human years). The creation, sustenance, and dissolution of this world are his three states, just as waking, dream, and deep sleep are the three states of the *jīva*. *virāṭa*, *sutrātman* and *avyākṛta* are the three bodies of that Virāṭa Puruṣa.”(Vac. Gadh. 1/12). Bhadreśādāsa also follows this principle: “द्विपरार्धकालसीमितं तदायुः” (AUSB 1/1/2, p.419). *Īśvaras* as we said, are different and superior to *jīvas*. *Īśvaras* and *jīvas* are both under the authority of Parabrahman.

2.3 Īśvaras’ Bondage

Here the being of the Vairāja Puruṣa (also known Virāṭa Puruṣa) as a *īśvara*, who is bound by *māyā* but lives longer lifespan. His life entails two *parārdhas* (2×10^{17} human years). Since *īśvaras* are suffered from ignorance, Svāminārāyaṇa mentions explicitly in Vac. Gadh. 2/31 that Virāṭa Puruṣa has bondage of *māyic* cycle. Therefore they require *brahmavidyā*. But can they attain it? Bhadreśādāsa answers:

yes. “जीवकोटिगतानामीश्वरकोटिगतानां चोभयविधदेवानाम् अपि ब्रह्मविद्यायामधिकारोस्ति” (BSSB 1/3/26, p.112) “They are eligible for *Brahmavidyā* just as the *jīva*.” Afterward, they attain the ultimate liberation via *arciradi* marg. The Bhāṣyakāra deciphers: “उत्तरायणं... जीवेश्वराणां कृते मोक्षमार्गतयाधारभूतम्” (PUSB 1/10, p.182). “The northern way (celestial way to the abode of Parabrahman) is the substratum for the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* providing the way to liberation.” So, in conclusion, we got the point that *īśvaras* are subject to bondage and liberation like the *jīvas*.

2.4 How *īśvaras* Work:

We discussed that *īśvaras* have their particular role and function in the universe assigned by Parabrahman.²¹⁹ Bhadreśadāsa also comments to AU 1/1/2. The Bhāṣyakāra explains: “लोकपालान् सृजानि” (AUSB 1/1/2, p.491) “Parabrahman gives bodies to *īśvaras* as a role of the creation.” At the commencement of this creation, He (Parabrahman) saw (contemplated), “These worlds (have been created by me). Now, let me create the guardians (*īśvaras*) of the worlds.”

Here, we can present *īśvaras* collectively as all those sentient beings involved in the creative and governing processes of a *brahmānda* (e.g. Prādhān Puruṣa, Virāṭa Puruṣa, Anirūddha, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, etc.) encompassing the Hindū triad (Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva), those divinities who energize various forces of nature (Sūrya, Candra, Varuṇa, etc.) and all *avatāras*, albeit with the special re-entering of Parabrahman (Matsya, Varāha, Nṛsiṃha, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, etc.)

The Bhāṣyakāra also narrates it in detail in the BSSB: “इदानीं प्रसङ्गात् प्रपञ्चक्रम उपस्थाप्यते...तस्माच्च वैराजपुरुषाद् ब्रह्मा विष्णुर्महेशचेति मिथोभिन्नचेतनास्त्रयो देवाः समुत्पद्यन्ते... ततः समग्रस्थावरजङ्गमिका सृष्टिः समुद्पद्यते” (BSSB 2/3/16, p.229) “By the will of Parabrahman, the entire universe is created. To briefly elaborate, points to a set *īśvaras* in as the lords of countless

²¹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/41

millions of *brahmāndas* which are full of sentient and non-sentient entities. There he explicitly mentions ‘Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Maheśa.’ Svāminārāyaṇa is denoting that from the converging of *māyā* (known in the creative process as *Mūla-Prakṛti*) and a liberated soul (given the designation ‘*Mūla-Puruṣa*’), and who together go on to create each individual *brahmānda*. This set of beings includes Virāṭa Puruṣa, who is the inner self of the universe. (Vac. Gadh. 2/10, and Gadh. 2/31). Its subtle body, like the subtle body of a *jīva*, consists of all internal cognitive senses.

2.5 The Relation Between *Īśvaras* and Parabrahman

In the Indian philosophical system, Parabrahman is accepted as the creator and governor of the world would seem to fit precisely with *īśvara*. By their name, too, etymologically meaning ‘lord’ or ‘powerful, one can be forgiven for mistaking ‘*īśvara*’ to denote Parabrahman, a personal deity. *Īśvaras* are mere village chiefs in front of Parabrahman as a world-emperor. This is most vividly presented in the Vac... “Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva pray to that Parabrahman, “*Mahārāja!* Please have mercy upon us” (Vac. Pan. 4, p.369). It expresses Parabrahman’s outright supremacy over even Brahma, Viṣṇu and Maheśa (Śiva).²²⁰

The *Śruti* declares this fact: “तमीश्वराणां परमं महेश्वरम्” (SU 6/7) “Parabrahman is the *Īśvara* (Lord) of all *īśvaras* (lords).” Svāminārāyaṇa proclaims: “This manifest form of Parabrahman Bhagavān before your eyes is ... the Lord of all lords (*īśvarnā paṇ īśvara*).” (Vac. Gadh. 3/38, p.664) The Bhāṣyakāra confirms: “ब्रह्मपरब्रह्मणोः जीवेश्वरप्रशासकत्वाज्जीवेश्वराणाम् इच्छाक्रियाज्ञानशक्तयः तदधीना इति वस्तुस्थितिः । एवं सत्यपि यथा कश्चित् सम्राट्मात्यो वा कस्मैचित् स्वप्रशास्य जनपदाधिकारिणे कांश्चनाधिकारान् प्रदाय तद्विनियोगे कार्यविशेषे अनुमितिमपि प्रयच्छति ‘त्वयैतत् त्वदिच्छया विनियोज्यम्’ इत्यादि ।” (BSSB 2/3/42, p.246)

The controller, inspirer, and mobilizer of the *īśvara* known as Virāṭa Puruṣa is Puruṣottama. (Vac. Gadh. 2.31, BSSB 2/4/14-15 p.261-262, KeUSB 3rd and 4th

²²⁰ SSS M-2, p.294

Khaṇḍa, p.49-56). Svāminārāyaṇa further explains this prominent fact that this doctrine is the most important and efficient to understand *avatāra-avatārin* principle, a significant and outstanding feature of the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana. As we will learn in the last portion of this chapter about the greatness of Parabrahman, where He is mentioned as the *avatārin*, the cause of all *avatāras*, on the other hand, these *avatāras* themselves are metaphysically *īśvara* and thus ontologically different from Parabrahman. It is only by Parabrahman's *aṇu-praveśa* (kind of 're-entering'). As a result, the *īśvaras* become able to function properly and finish the task which has been given by Parabrahman.²²¹

Bhadreśadāsa also averred: “कार्यविशेषनिमित्तसामयिकविभिन्नचेतनान्तरानुप्रवेशरूपेण यथा रामकृष्णादिविभूतयः” (BSSB 1/2/30, p.83) “Parabrahman reentered *īśvaras* like Rama, Kṛṣṇa, etc. and empowered them in order to fulfill some special tasks for a certain period.” It is noteworthy to mention here that apart from their functioning in general, *īśvaras* also cannot experience anything independently without the grace of Parabrahman.²²²

All being of the universe attain their name and form by Parabrahman's inspiration. In Vac. Kār.1, Svāminārāyaṇa asserts that when the *īśvaras* (and *jīvas*) were inert at the state of deep sleep at the time of final dissolution without assuming a name and form then Parabrahman inspired them to assume them. Consequently, they come into action. The Bhāṣyakāra states: “परमात्मसंकल्पाधीनतया जीवेश्वरात्मावृत्तवासनाजन्यदेहयोग एव यथोक्तबन्धे तद्विपर्यये वा कारणम् |” (BSSB 3/2/6, p.287). “In all ways and in every state, then, the *īśvaras* are absolutely dependent on Parabrahman's wish for their bondage, freedom, functioning, and experiences, and for their very existence.”

²²¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/31, Pan.7

²²² Vac. Gadh. 2/21

The Bhāṣyakāra concludes: “मुक्तजीवेश्वरमायादिभ्योपि सदैव अत्यन्तोत्कृष्ट-अक्षरब्रह्मणोपि पुरुषोत्तमस्य उत्तमत्वोक्त्या तन्निखदिकपरमशक्तिसामर्थ्यविभवः सूच्यते” (GSB 15/18, p.316) Parabrahman is superior to Akṣara which is superior to the *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā* and *mukta*. That reflects the unlimited controlling power and sovereignty of Parabrahman. We can conclude the *īśvara* topic with SP: “An *īśvara* is an eternal *cetanā* (sentient) entity distinct from Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and *jīvas*. Despite being extremely powerless when compared to Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman; these *īśvaras* bear greater power and knowledge than *jīvas*. Through his wish, Paramātmā inspires them to perform tasks of creation, etc., of the *brahmāṇḍa*. Like the *jīvas*, these *īśvaras* are countless in number, infinitesimal (extremely small), indivisible, and possess other such qualities. They are *jñānasvarūpa*,” *jñātā* (those who know), and eternally bound by *māyā*. They perform righteous and unrighteous *karmas* (actions) and experience the fruits of those actions. Pradhāna Puruṣa, Virāṭa Puruṣa, the deities of their senses (*Indriyas*) and the inner faculties (*Antaḥkaraṇa*), Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheśa, and others are all beings of the *īśvara* category, and these *īśvaras* are ontologically and inherently distinct from one another.”

3. MĀYĀ

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy, out of the five eternal entities, the only non-sentient entity is *māyā*. The *Svāminārāyaṇa* Bhāṣyakāra deciphers the very nature of *māyā*:

माया त्रिगुणयुक्ता स्याद् ब्रह्मपरात्मशासिता ।

परिणामवती नित्या विस्मयकारिणी जडा ॥ SSSK 279 ॥

“*Māyā* which is characterized by the three *guṇas* is governed by Akṣara and Puruṣottama. It is ever-changing, eternal, non-sentient, and astounding.” *Svāminārāyaṇa* also deciphered the nature of *māyā* in the *Vacanāmṛta*. “*Prakṛti* or *māyā* is characterized by the three *guṇas*, and by both insentience and sentiency. It is eternal, indistinct, the field of all beings and all elements including *mahattattva*, and also the divine power of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/12, p. 40). Known

vividly as *māyā*, *mahā-māyā*, *mūla-māyā*, *prakṛti*, and *mūla-prakṛti*, it is the cause of the universal material source of the universe. The form nature and function of *māyā* as matter and ignorance that all is encompassed within this topic.

Thus, the third metaphysical principle in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta is *māyā prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* is real (*vastavika*). It is unconscious (*acid*), and also insentient, inert (*jada*). It is pervasive (*vibhu*) and enveloping. Except for Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman released souls, and *paramadhāma*, it pervades everywhere and envelopes everyone. In its original state it is unmanifest (*avyakta*) and unmodified (*nirviśesa*). It is the power or the accessory of Parabrahman. It is an instrument useful for the purpose of creation. It exists in the body (*śarīra*) of the Lord as its part and parcel. It is pervaded by God. It operates only at the will of God. It is totally controlled and supported by God. It has its sway only over the bound souls (*baddha - jīvas*) laboring under the spell of *avidyā-karma*. It also has a sway over the cosmic-selves laboring under the cosmic fetters of *avyakrtadeha*. It is the primordial matter, extremely subtle but most powerful to manifest in its myriad forms. It, therefore, is described as the most mysterious and wonderful (*vismāyākaraka*), for its penetration, effect, cog, mire, and wiles and tricks are extremely difficult to decipher. It is impossible to get rid of the fetters of *māyā* by self-efforts. It envelopes the souls and causes false identification. It conceals the true nature of atman from the sight of the self, and it comes in the way of comprehending the true nature of Brahman and Parabrahman. In short, it is the cause of bondage both to *jīvas* and *īśvaras*.

In the *Vacanāmṛta*, *māyā* is defined as, “*Trigunatma tamah Krsnagaktirdehatadidayoh; jīvasya cahamamataheturmāyā avagamyatam.*”²²³ *Māyā-prakṛti* is the primordial matter having three *guṇas* (*sattva- rajas-tamas*) as

²²³ Vac. Gadh.1/12

its properties. It is of the nature of darkness-nescience. It is the power, the accessory of the Lord Parabrahman. It is the cause of false identification and attachment with one's body and its relations. The three *guṇas*, namely, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are the properties of *māyā-prakṛti*. As we discussed, *prakṛti* is endowed with three *guṇas*. It is insentient-inert but is at times described as *cidatmika* because of the sentient souls (*jīvas*) and cosmic-selves (*īśvara*) rest in its bosom. It is eternal, ever existent. It is *nirviśesa*, for in its original state it is bereft of manifestations of particulars such as earth, water, etc.

3.1 *Māyā* is Real

In the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana, *māyā* and other four ontological eternal entities are real. This fact also reflects the rich tradition of Vedic debate and discussion entailed in the Indian philosophical system. It is noteworthy to recount the debate here in part. Svāminārāyaṇa starts his discourse with pointedly addressing the *Advaitīn* regarding the central doctrine of strict monism. He says to him: “You proclaim that in reality, only Brahman exists. Moreover, you say with the exception of that Brahman, *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, *māyā*, the world, Vedas, the *śāstras*, and the *purāṇas* are all illusory. I can neither understand this concept of yours nor can I accept it.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/39, p.99) The *Advaitīn* presented his defense using vivid arguments, but each time, the *Vacanāmṛta* notes that Svāminārāyaṇa raised doubts to the *Advaitīn*'s response leaving the query unresolved. Then Svāminārāyaṇa commenced to resolve the query himself. “The words of those who have procured the *savikalpa* state noted in the Vedas, the *śāstra*, the *Purāṇas*, etc. mention all of those entities as being *satya* (real). However, the words of those who have attained the *nirvikalpa* state describe all of those entities as being *asatya* (non-real). In reality, however, they are not *asatya* (non-real). They are only described as being *asatya* (non-real) because they cannot be seen due to the influence of the *nirvikalpa* state.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/39, p.100)

In this manner, for all alterations, change, and transience, the universe is real. But sometimes the scriptures state it ‘*asatya*’. What does that mean? How can it be interpreted? The discernment of ‘*satya*’ and ‘*asatya*’ is analyzed in the *Vacanāmṛta*. It defines, “All forms that are the result of the entities evolved from *māyā* are *asatya*. Why? Because all those forms will be ruined in time. Conversely, the form of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma and the form of the *muktas* - the (liberated) attendants of Parabrahman - are all *satya*.” (Gadh. 3/38, p.664). The Bhāṣyakāra also affirms: “यदिदं किञ्च जडचेतनात्मकजगत् प्रत्यक्षतो शब्दतो परिज्ञायते तत् सर्वमपि सत्यमिति वास्तवं पारमार्थिकमेव न तु मिथ्या” (TUSB 2/6/3, p.380) “The world (*māyā*), which consists of sentient and non-sentient entities and is known to us through the perception or verbal testimony, is not illusory; it is real therefore cannot be dismissed.” Moreover, Bhadrēśadāsa clarifies: “जगज्जन्मादिकर्तृत्वस्य ब्रह्मलक्षणत्वेन उपस्थापनात् तस्य पारमार्थिकत्वस्वाभाविकत्वादिसिद्धेः नैतच्छ्रुतिरजतवदध्यस्तं न वा जपाकुसुमन्यायेनौपाधिकमिति” (BSSB 1/1/2, p.16). “When Parabrahman creates this world through *māyā*, that is also real. It is not superimposing a false appearance upon the reality or mixing up the real and the unreal as we see a snake instead of a rope. Moreover, it is not as the particular appearance which generates due to the other factor like *japākusuma*.”

Yet, being composed of *māyā*, it can (without a firm refuge in Parabrahman) befuddle the *jīva* away from Parabrahman. Nonetheless, the creation of *māyā* is useful in another way. The world, the creation of *māyā* has set a platform where the *jīva* can perform spiritual endeavors and transcend *māyā* and reach Parabrahman.

3.2 Three *Guṇas* of *Māyā*

Svāminārāyaṇa states that *māyā* consists of three *guṇas*: “*Māyā* has three essential qualities, or *guṇas*, known as *sattva* (literal goodness), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (darkness).” (Vac. Loyā.10, p.319). Similarly, Bhadrēśdāsa pronounces: “एषा सर्वैरनुभूयमाना गुणमयी सत्त्वरजस्तमाख्यत्रिगुणात्मिका...माया” (GSB 7/14, p.163). “*Māyā*’s these three *Guṇas*; *sāttvika*, *rājasika*, and *tāmasika*, are experienced by all.” Thus, *māyā* is real

(*sat*). *Māyā* is possessed of three *guṇas*, and hence, is a concrete, qualified and real entity. It is the power or accessory of *Puruṣottama*. It repeatedly performs the same function (of evolving and enveloping the worlds) as willed by God. *Svāminārāyaṇa* makes a distinction between two *prakṛtis*, the higher and the lower. The higher *prakṛti* is called *Mūlaprakṛti* or *Mahāmāyā*; while the lower *prakṛti* is called *pradhāna* or *māyā*. Both possess these three *guṇas*. These three *guṇas of māyā* are the root cause of the bondage of *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. Even *sāttvika guṇa* binds *jīvas* and *īśvaras* and brings the cycle of birth and death.

Most hazardously, *tamoguṇa* is a cause of delusion, anger, greed, quarrelsomeness, fear, violence, illusion, dejection, connivance, etc. Significantly, however, no one *guṇa* works separately; there is always a group of *guṇas*, although *guṇa* can have a more pervasiveness over the other two *guṇas*. Beyond these *māyic* qualities, there is a liberated state which is called *nirguṇa* (without the *guṇas*) or *guṇātita* state.²²⁴

3.3 Insentiency and Sentiency

Māyā is fundamentally and eternally material. It is insentient (*jaḍa*), meaning it is without consciousness. It is not sentient (*cetanā*) like *Parabrahman*, *Akṣarabrahman*, *īśvaras*, and *jīvas* and entirely different from them. moreover, countless sentient beings (*jīvas and īśvaras*) lie dormant within *māyā*, therefore the term *jadacidātmikā*²²⁵ is used for *māyā*. The *Bhāṣyakāra* echoes this fact in other words: “जीवेश्वरात्मानुल्लिप्तानि...प्रलयावस्थायामपि प्रलीनभावगतानि” (BSSB 2/1/36, p.186) “*Jīvas* and *īśvaras* and their *karmas* are preserved in *māyā* even after final dissolution.”

All elements, physical and psychical evolve from *māyā-prakṛti*. They all are concrete and qualified. *Māyā-prakṛti* as such is an unconscious inert principle, nevertheless because of the entry of *antaryāmi-śakti* in it through the medium of a

²²⁴ BGSB 14/26

²²⁵ Vac. Gadh.1/12

highly conscious principle called Mahāpuruṣa, it as if becomes conscious and functions like a sentient.

3.4 Eternal and Indistinct

Like Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *īśvaras*, and *jīvas*, *māyā* is eternal - without beginning and without end. It was never created, nor will it ever be destroyed.²²⁶ One may overcome it to secure liberation, but it can never be eliminated. The SB also reveals: “प्रकृतिं त्रिगुणात्मिकां जडभूतां मायां ...त्वम् अनादी... विद्धि जानीहि” (BGSB 13/19, p.285). “Know the non-sentient *prakṛti* to be beginningless and endless; and also know that all expansions and *guṇas* arise from the *prakṛti*.” But unlike the other four entities, *māyā* is not unchangeable. As we saw in the opening chapter of this part, *māyā* is set apart from those sentient entities, which are immutably eternal (*kūṭastha nitya*), by having mutable eternality (*pariṇāmi nityatā*). Though never being eliminated, it nonetheless undertakes various transformations during the process of creation and sustenance. Upon final or ultimate dissolution, however, *māyā* is not destroyed; it simply disperses into a minutely compact or indistinctly subtle form within one part of Akṣarabrahman’s light.

“It is this aspect of *māyā*’s mutability that grants its products - the material body, objects, and all the features that encompass the world to be changing and perishable, revealing how beings can be born and can die and how things are said to be created and destroyed. Therefore, all things that evolved from *mūla-māyā*, including the elements of *mahattattva*, etc., are in fact, generated and dissolved in each cycle of creation. During the phase of absolute rest after final dissolution, *māyā* is said to be non-distinct (*nirviśeṣa*)”²²⁷, because all its creations with name and form have been merged within it. It, too, merges into a subtle, unmanifest (*avyakta*) form within Akṣarabrahman. On the other hand, when called into action for the process of

²²⁶ Vac. Gadh.1/7, 3/10

²²⁷ Vac. Gadh.1/12

creation, *māyā* becomes especially gross and manifest through its countless creations, each with a distinctive name and form inspired by Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

3.5 Material Bedrock of All Beings and Things

Māyā as the matter is not inevitably opposed to spiritual spirit. Indeed, it can be positively and complementary useful, outstandingly in understanding Parabrahman's purpose of the creation of the universe. We shall also shed some light on this topic further. In Vac. Gadh. 3/10, Svāminārāyaṇa charges this analogy cited earlier, which affirms *māyā* as the field or material substratum of all beings and things. Bhadreśadāsa cites: “देवमनुष्यमृगपक्ष्यादिशरीरतयोपदिष्टं क्षेत्रम्” (BGSB 13/19, p.285) “*Māyā* serves as a substratum for the bodies of devas, humans, animals, birds, etc.” In order to explain the creative process, this idea is also very significant. The *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, as we saw, at the time of dissolution remain dormant like untermated seeds in the agriculture field. After that, *māyā*'s association with *Puruṣa*, at the time of creation, the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* sprout forth from *māyā* with names and forms.

3.6 Power of Parabrahman

As we elucidated that *māyā* is an insentient entity. While *māyā* is the basic raw material of the universe. Parabrahman creates the world using *māyā* as a raw material. *Māyā* is described as the power of Parabrahman or the means by which He creates. For Parabrahman, *māyā* is a tool or means for his creative ends. This should not, however, be confused as implying *māyā* to be an inherent quality or consort of Parabrahman; his nature in no way entertains *māyā* nor is he affiliated to it in person. Svāminārāyaṇa explains elaborately in Vac. Gadh. 1/13, where he describes that *Kāla* (time) and *māyā* are Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman's powers.

The Bhāṣyakāra also states: “परमात्माधीना तच्छक्तिरूपा प्रपञ्चोपादानतया दैवी देवाधिदेवेन परमात्मनाधिष्ठित्वाद् दैवी माया” (BGSB 7/14, p.163) “*Māyā* is indeed Parabrahman’s power consisting of three *guṇas* or moods of mind is called *Daivī* as well.” As Svāminārāyaṇa frequently uses, ‘Parabrahman’s *māyā*’²²⁸ to clear the fact.

3.7 Ignorance

Māyā is also the embodiment of ignorance. It prevents us from the true knowledge of the eternal entities. Svāminārāyaṇa asserts: “*Māyā* is anything that impedes a devotee of Parabrahman while meditating on Parabrahman’s form.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/1, p.30) Svāminārāyaṇa undergoes this idea similarly in the last published preachings.

“*Māyā* is nothing but the sense of I-ness towards the body and my-ness towards the bodily relations.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/39, p.665) In Vac. Gadh. 2/36, he is yet more firm and unequivocal in expressing that *māyā* obstructs the seeker in the form of worldly affection.

As the Bhāṣyakāra expresses: “प्रकृतेः मूलमायायाः गुणसम्मूढाः गुणैः सत्त्वरजस्तमोभिः सम्मूढा असुखकण्डेषु सुखबुद्धिमाप्नुवाना विपर्ययस्तविज्ञानाः गुणकर्मसु स्वकर्तृत्वममत्वादिधिया सज्जन्ते समासक्ता भवन्ति” (BGSB 3/29, p.83) “The *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are infatuated by the three *guṇas* of *māyā*; as a result, they indulge in the worldly pleasures which are the cause of misery.” Thus, to get liberation and remove the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth along with self-realization and Parabrahman-realization, then, *māyā* must be transcended.²²⁹

²²⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/34, Pan.3, Gadh. 2/65

²²⁹ SSSK 291

3.8 *Māyā* and the Creation of the Universes

Svāminārāyaṇa has given a large description of the process of creation in various discourses.²³⁰ In the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya Bhadreśadāsa meticulously narrates the whole process of creation: “परमात्मा अकामयत समष्टिव्यष्टिरूपजगत् सृष्ट्यर्थं संकल्पयाञ्चकार। तत्संकल्पप्रकारमाह बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति देवमनुष्यदिरूपेण बहु स्याम्। जगदुत्पादयितुं प्रकृतिपुरुषद्वारा प्रधानपुरुषादिरूपेण भवेयमिति संकल्पितवान्” (TUSB 2/6/3, p.378) “Parabrahman resolved, may I be many, may I grow forth through the creation of Prakṛti-Puruṣa, Pradhāna-Puruṣa, devas, humans, etc.” now we explain the creation in detail according to BSSB (2/3/16, p.229) and BGSB (9/10, pp.207-208).

The Bhāṣyakāra also puts forward this point: “तस्माच्चैकस्मात् प्रधानपुरुषयुगलादेकं ब्रह्माण्डमुद्पद्यते” (BGSB 9/10, p. 208). “From each pair of Pradhāna-Puruṣa is produced a *brahmānda* (what we have loosely been calling ‘world’).” Focusing now on a single *brahmānda*, he further explains that the *brahmānda* which itself comprises fourteen *lokas* (realms). Since there are *ananta* Pradhāna-Puruṣas, and *brahmāndas* are produced. In the process first Parabrahman inspires Akṣarabrahman. Then a series of creations emerge from Pradhāna-Puruṣa. As a result, the body of the world is produced. We have to keep it in mind that this *brahmānda* in the form of *īśvara*, Vairāja Puruṣa is a sentient entity.

When we look at the entire creation a natural question emerges that who is the efficient cause and the material cause of this creation? The answer is Parabrahman. By re-entering and empowering each new element of the order is created, He takes the process further. The Bhāṣyakāra provides a statement from the BS commentary: “तस्माच्च वैरजपुरुषाद् ब्रह्मा विष्णुर् महेशचेति मिथो भिन्नचेतनास्त्रयो देवा समुद्पद्यते ।” (BSSB 2/3/16, p.229). “From Vairāja Puruṣa originates Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa, each with own *īśvara*-

²³⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/12, Gadh. 1/13, Gadh. 1/41 and also Vac. Gadh. 1/51, Gadh. 2/31

selves, and then from Brahmā (enabled by Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman) extends the rest of the creation for *jīvas*.

This starts with Marici, the first son of Brahmā, and others like him who supervise the procreation and protection of life, and hence are called *Prajāpatis* (literally, ‘lords of the people’). Then, Kaśyapa and others emerge who are like him and also inherit the role of *Prajāpatis*. Finally, from them are formed Indra and other *devatās* (divinities), *daityas* (demons), humans, animals, vegetation, and all other moveable and immovable life-forms.²³¹ Exclusively, each *brahmānda* is said to encompass fourteen realms or *lokas*. Of these, the eighth from the bottom, called Mr̥tyuloka, relates to the earth, where humans inhabit. Above Mr̥tyuloka, the higher realms (jointly called ‘svarga’) are inhabited by *devatās*, seers and higher beings, while the lower regions (called ‘pātāla’ as a group) are inhabited by *daityas*, nocturnal creatures, and lower beings. Individually, fourteen-realm *brahmānda* is stated to have *aṣṭa āvaraṇa*, or ‘eight sheaths’. These material components refer to, in ascending order, *pr̥thvī*, *jala*, *teja*, *vāyu*, *ākāśa*, *ahaṃkāra*, *mahattattva* and *prakṛti* (i.e., both Pradhāna-Prakṛti and Mūla-Prakṛti).

The definition and description of *prakṛti* aforesaid largely refer to Mūlaprakṛti alone. It is the Mūlaprakṛti (Mahāmāyā) that is beginningless, eternal, unborn, uncreated, and unmodified (*nirviseṣa*). The three *guṇas*, namely *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are its properties. The state of equilibrium of three *guṇas* (*samyavastha*) is known as Mūlaprakṛti. It is the Mūlaprakṛti that is described as *nirviseṣa*, because it stands for the state of equilibrium of three *guṇas* during which it remains unmodified into its evolutes such as *pr̥thvī*, *jala*, etc.

²³¹ To understand the creation thoroughly we can look at the chart given in the appendix.

The Mahāmāyā i.e. Mūlaprakṛti is the power and instrument wielded by God Parabrahman. The Sruti says: “*Māyām tu prakṛtim viddhi mayinam tu mahesvaram.*” (SU 4/10) Mūlaprakṛti is *māyā*; and the Lord of *māyā* (i.e. Māyin) is Parabrahman. In other words, the Lord (supreme), the supporter (*ādhara*), the controller (*niyantā*) or (*preraka*) and the Immanent Self (of Mūlaprakṛti) is Parabrahman (the Lord of lords). Prior to all creations, an infinite number of *pradhānas* (lower *prakṛtis*) and their lords (*puruṣas/īśvaras*) lay dormant in seed-like forms in the womb of Mūlaprakṛti.

Since they all lie in a subtle unmanifest form in the womb of Mūlaprakṛti, it is described as the Original/First Unmanifest (*Mūla-avyakta/Prathamaavyakta*) and as the subtlest (*sūkṣmarūpa*). As it is an unconscious-unintelligent principle, it is bereft of knowledge and self-luminosity. It, therefore, is called ‘*jada*’ i.e. inert. However, when it is united with its lord Mūlapuruṣa, because of his permeation and presidency (*adhisthana*) over it, Mūlaprakṛti too as if becomes sentient (like a human body by being pervaded by the soul from within), and hence, at times described as ‘*caitanyarupa*’. Mūlaprakṛti, by its very nature, in itself unconscious-inert, appears to be sentient on account of entry and pervasion of Mūlapuruṣa in it, and hence becomes *caitanyarupa*. The conscious (*cidrupa*) souls (*jīvas*) and cosmic selves (*īśvaras*) rest dormant in the bosom of Mūlaprakṛti during the period of final dissolution (*atyantikapralaya*). Therefore, Mūlaprakṛti, which in itself is inert, but has *cetana-varga* (*jīvas* and *īśvaras*) resting in it, - is called ‘*Jada-cidatmika*’.

It is called ‘*parartha*’ because it evolves for the (purpose) benefit of *jīvas* and *īśvara*. It does not evolve for self-enjoyment but evolves for the sake of *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. The Sruti says: “It (Mūlaprakṛti) procreates innumerable offsprings (*pradhāna* / lower *prakṛtis*) of its kind.” (CU 6/2/1) In other words, from the Mūlaprakṛti originate an infinite number of lower *prakṛtis* called *pradhāna* as its offsprings (*prajā*). It also is regarded as the resting field (*kṣetra*) of all the *jīvas* and

īśvara together with all evolutes of *pradhāna*. This point is explained thus: The *māyā-prakṛti* is like the soil on the earth. The *jīvas* resting dormant in it are like the seeds lying buried in the soil. *Puruṣa* i.e. *īśvara* is like a cloud pregnant with water. Just as by the shower of the rain from the clouds the water comes in contact of seeds lying in the soil and they sprout, so do the *jīvas* lying dormant in *māyā*, *prakṛti*, at the will of Parabrahman.

3.8.1 The Real Creator and Cause

We can realize after evaluation over the creation of the universe that it's Parabrahman's wish that inspires the creation. Parabrahman is both the material and efficient cause of his creation. *Māyā* or *prakṛti* functions as His instrument or power. This can only be realized from scriptural revelation. Therefore Svāminārāyaṇa concludes as an example of each: "It is through Parabrahman that everything mobile and immobile is created." (Vac. Gadh. 2/10, p. 406) "It is Parabrahman who is the creator, sustainer, and dissolver of the world." (Vac. Loyā.17, p.343). Bhadrēśadāsa explains and explores this fundamental fact in his commentaries: "अहं संकल्पमात्रेण तत्तज्जीवेश्वराणां तत्तदात्मानुष्ठितप्राचीनकर्मानुसारं तत्कर्मफलोपभोगाय कल्पादौ सर्गकाले तानि विसृजामि" (BGSB 9/7, p.206). "Through my wish, I the Parabrahman myself create the *bhogas* (enjoyments) for *jīvas* and *īśvaras* according to their *karmas* at the commencement of the creation." while commenting on the *sūtra*: '*Janmādyasya yataḥ*' (BS 1/1/2), the Bhāṣyakāra summarises that the entire creation of this world is by Brahman and Parabrahman only.

The Bhāṣyakāra is quick to accentuate with impeccable arguments and references of the *Prasthānatrayī* that only Parabrahman can be the complete cause of everything, not anyone or anything else. Additionally, in the *Racanānupattyadhikaraṇam* he countered all the possibilities of *māyā*, *prakṛti*, or

pradhāna as an ultimate creator: “केवलं प्रधानं जगत्कारणं न ।” (BSSB 2/1/1, p.189). “*Prakṛti* is not the ultimate cause of the creation.”

This is the prominent difference between the *Sāṃkhya* School and the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy. The term “*prakṛti*” will be recognized by those familiar with the *Sāṃkhya* School, and indeed the conceptualization of *māyā* in *Svāminārāyaṇa* system of belief is similar, except that whereas *prakṛti* in the *Sāṃkhya* system is considered wholly independent of initiating creation, in *Svāminārāyaṇa* system, *māyā* is dependent on and controlled by Parabrahman. Thus, Bhadrēśadāsa disproven the *Sāṃkhya* position: “निर्बीजसाङ्ख्यतन्त्रमसमञ्जसम्” (BSSB 2/2/10, p.195) hence the *Sāṃkhya* system is unsatisfactory in consideration of the creation.

3.8.2 Purpose of the Creation

After the valid source of scriptural references and sharp arguments, it is now confirmed that the efficient and material cause of the entire universe is Parabrahman. Thus, the creation, development, and dissolution of the world is only due to Him.

Svāminārāyaṇa then enunciates the definite purpose of the world and how it is of benefit to others by firstly citing in the *Vacanāmṛta*- “Therefore, Parabrahman created this universe for the sake of the *jīvas*’ liberation Parabrahman sustains it for the sake of the *jīvas*’ liberation. In fact, Parabrahman also causes its dissolution for the sake of the *jīvas*’ liberation.” (Vac. Kār.1, p.251)

He also corroborated his perspective with the *purāṇa*, translating it thus: “Parabrahman created the intellect, senses, mind and vital breaths of all people

enable the *jīvas* to enjoy the sense-objects, to take birth, to transmigrate to other realms, and to attain liberation.”²³² The Bhāṣyakāra also makes the same statement:

सुष्टुयुद्धवक्रमो ज्ञेयः सहजानन्दवाक्यतः।

नैकजीवेश्वराणां हि मोक्षाय सृष्टिसर्जनम्॥ SSSK 286 ॥

“The order of the creation should be known from Svāminārāyaṇa himself. Parabrahman created this universe for the sake of the *jīvas*’ and *īśvaras*’ liberation.” Svāminārāyaṇa explains that an intellect, senses, etc. are given by Parabrahman at the time of creation. At the time of dissolution, everything absorbed in *māyā* and *māyā* also rests in the one portion of Parabrahman.²³³

The Bhāṣyakāra reveals the purpose of the creation in the *Prayojanatvaddhikāraṇam*: “परमदयालुः सकलजीवेश्वरोद्दिधीर्षुः परमात्मा सहजानन्दोपि सर्वेषामपवर्गाय केवलया लीलया सहजमेव परिश्रमं विनैव प्रसन्नात्मा सन् जगद्रचने प्रवर्तते।” (BSSB 2/1/34, p.184) “Out of his immense grace, Parabrahman created this universe for the liberation of all. In that process, he does not experience any type of burden but a great pleasure.” What the Bhāṣyakāra indicates is that this world is not created by mere chance by Parabrahman.

3.8.3 Sustenance

After creation, Parabrahman’s other great responsibility is for the sustenance²³⁴ of the world. We examined the omni-agency of Parabrahman, relationship with the material and immaterial world. The Bhāṣyakāra also states it while commenting on the *sūtra*: *Janmādyasya yataḥ*- “जन्म आदिर्यस्य तज्जन्मादि, उत्पत्तिस्थितिप्रलयमिति... स्थितिश्च तयोस्तन्तरालकालीनप्रपञ्चवस्था” (BSSB 1/1/2, p. 12-13) “Brahman and Parabrahman are the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the universe. Sustain means the state that falls

²³² BP-10/87/2

²³³ Vac. Pan. 1

²³⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/13, 2/39

between the creation and final dissolution of the universe.” The TUSB also highlights the same fact.²³⁵

3.8.4 Dissolution

Though *māyā* is ultimately perishable, the entire creation starts to immediately degenerate.²³⁶ The scriptures call it dissolution, or *pralaya*. This is not the end or death of *māyā*, since it is an eternal entity. The Bhāṣyakāra affirms: “येन कारणभूतेन जातानि समुत्पन्नानि भूतानि जीवन्ति सम्यक् प्राणधारणादिना स्थितिं पोषणं च लभन्ते। यत् कारणभूतमेव प्रति प्रलयकाले प्रयन्ति लीयमानानि सन्ति अभि संविशन्ति अभितः स्थूलावस्थां परित्यज्य सूक्ष्मावस्थया संविशन्ति।” (TUSB 3/1/1, p.396). “That from which these beings are born, that by which, when born, these beings live, that into which they enter upon departing, that you should know, that is Brahman, by whose control they all change the state.”

In Vac. Kār. 1 Svāminārāyaṇa explains that Parabrahman has an elegant purpose in creating and dissolving the universe: “Parabrahman also causes its dissolution for the sake of the *jīvas*’ liberation ... to allow the *jīvas* – tired as a result of undergoing many births and deaths - to rest.” (Vac. Kār.1, p.251)

There are four types of *pralayas*, (end). They are 1. *Nitya Pralaya* (constant dissolution) 2. *Nimitta Pralaya* (stimulated dissolution) 3. *Prakṛta Pralaya* (general dissolution) 4. *Ātmaṇṭika Pralaya* (final or ultimate dissolution). Svāminārāyaṇa illustrates all four in detail in Vac. Gadh. 1/12, Amd.2 and the *Bhūgol-Khagol* letter, with the last also incorporating an account of the huge cosmic timescale and domain of a *brahmānda*. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra also gives comprehensive information about the *pralayas*.

चतुर्धा प्रलयः प्रोक्तो नित्यो नैमित्तिकस्तथा।

प्राकृतिकस्तृतीयः स्यात् तुर्य आत्यन्तिको लयः॥ SSSK 302 ॥

²³⁵ TUSB 3/1/1, p.396

²³⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/13, 2/39

Based on these facts, we can arrive at the following succinct description of each level of *pralaya*.

Nitya Pralaya - Svāminārāyaṇa asserts: “The day-to-day death of the bodies of individual humans, devas, demons, and others is called *Nitya Pralaya*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/12, p.44).

Nimitta Pralaya- If *Nitya Pralaya* is associated with *jīvas*, *Nimitta Pralaya* is associated with *īśvaras*. Svāminārāyaṇa illustrates *Nimitta Pralaya* as Brahma’s deep sleep, “The body of the *īśvara* called Virāṭa (Puruṣa) has a lifespan of two *parārdhas* (2×10^{17} human years). Fourteen *manvantaras* (c. 306,720,000 human years) lapse during one of Virāṭa Puruṣa’s days. His night is of the same duration as the day. The Lower ten realms of the *brahmānda* remain in existence during his day, and after his night falls, they are dissolved. This is called *Nimitta Pralaya*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/12, p. 43). The bottom ten of a *brahmānda*’s fourteen realms are disintegrated at the end of *Nimitta Pralaya*, i.e., up to and including Svargaloka.

Prakṛta Pralaya- Svāminārāyaṇa expounds: “When the two *parārdhas* (2×10^7 human years) of Virāṭa Puruṣa have elapsed, the body of Virāṭa is vanished along with Satyaloka and the other realms. At that time, Pradhāna-Prakṛti, Puruṣa, and the twenty-four elements including *mahattattva* are enthralled back into Mahā-Māyā. This is called *Prakṛta Pralaya*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/12, pp. 43-44).

Ātmaṇṭika Pralaya -This third level leads us to the final and universal level of ‘end’, which can be of two types: actual and subjective. This final dissolution occurs when Parabrahman decides. “*Ātmaṇṭika Pralaya* occurs when countless millions of *brahmāndas* are destroyed. At the time, even Prakṛti-Puruṣa - the cause of Pradhāna-Puruṣas - draws countless *brahmāndas* within itself, and is then eclipsed by the light of Akṣara-Puruṣa (who in turn is absorbed into Akṣarabrahman). This

fourth type of dissolution is called *Ātyaṃtika Pralaya*.” (Vac. *Bhūgol-Khagol*, p. 677).

Jñāna Pralaya -The second type of pralaya is *Jñāna Pralaya* which is subjective dissolution. It is an elevated individual state of understanding induced by philosophical knowledge (*jñāna*) where the spiritual aspirant does not perceive these-worldly things anymore even in his very life. Only pure consciousness remains in his sight as if a complete dissolution would have happened for him. Svāminārāyaṇa expounds: “In *Ātyaṃtika Pralaya*, which is *Jñāna Pralaya*, everything up to and including *prakṛti* is eclipsed by the light of Brahman.” (Vac. Amd. 2, p.574) Explaining upon this state of enlightenment, Svāminārāyaṇa firstly expounds in Vac. Gadh. 1/24 that *jñāna* transcends Prakṛti-Puruṣa. He then goes further: “When this *jñāna* attains an elevated spiritual state, Prakṛti-Puruṣa and the entities evolved from them do not come into view. This is known as *jñāna pralaya*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/24, p.66) Guṇātitanand Svāmī links: “What is *jñāna pralaya*? It is to eradicate every single work of *prakṛti* from one’s heart and become *Brahmarūpa*. Then nothing else remains to be done; this was the very principle of Svāminārāyaṇa.”²³⁷

Thus, *māyā* has been the cause of our births and deaths since time immemorial. However, Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman are forever entirely untainted by, beyond, and the *śariri* of this *māyā*. *Jīvas* (finite selves), *īśvaras* (cosmic selves), Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman differ from *māyā-prakṛti* because they are sentient and with conscious, while the later is inert unconscious; former being self- illumined, while later being illumined by principle other than itself; former being the agent (the doer) while later being action (or principle to be acted upon); former being the witnesses, while later being witnessed.

²³⁷ SV5/195

Māyā-prakṛti of Svāminārāyaṇa Vedanta differs from the *Sāṅkhya prakṛti*. The *prakṛti* of *Sāṅkhya* is an independent principle; while that of Svāminārāyaṇa's *māyā* is totally dependent on Parabrahman and is supported and controlled by Him. The *prakṛti* of *Sāṅkhya* is a triad of three *guṇas*. These *guṇas* are its constituents. As against this, the *prakṛti* of Svāminārāyaṇa is a principle (reality) possessing three *guṇas* as its, properties or qualities. The *prakṛti* of *Sāṅkhya* unites by itself the *puruṣa* and evolves the world. But, in case of Svāminārāyaṇa, the union and disunion of *prakṛti* with *puruṣa* affected by the will of God for the purpose of evolution and dissolution of the universe the *prakṛti* of *Sāṅkhya* is an independent category distinct from *puruṣa*. It has no power in itself to fructify the karmas of *jīvas*. Though co-eval with Parabrahman as a dependent entity/element in the body (*śarīra*) of Parabrahman (Who is its *śarīrī*), it is only by His will that it subsists as His accessory (*śakti*) and is able to function in the evolutionary process.

Māyā-prakṛti of Svāminārāyaṇa Vedanta is totally different from the *māyā-avidya* of the Śaṅkara's *Advaita*. In *Advaita* of Śaṅkara, *māyā-avidya* is an indefinable-indescribable category that is neither real, nor unreal, nor both. As against this, in Svāminārāyaṇa Vedanta, *māyā-prakṛti* is a reality distinct from other reals (namely *jīva*, *īśvara*, Brahman and Parabrahman), but totally dependent on and supported, immanence and controlled by Parabrahman. It is the power or an accessory of Parabrahman. Since *māyā-prakṛti* is real, the world according to Svāminārāyaṇa is real. The world is real, a real place for retribution and moral deserts. The world is not an appearance, nor illusion, nor unreality from any standpoint. Real the world is though perishable it is. The world is real but not eternal.

4. AKṢARABRAHMAN

As we noted that in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta School, its five eternal entities (or realities) are its important and unique contribution to the philosophical world; Parabrahman, Brahman, *māyā*, *īśvara*, and *jīva*. This section highlights the second-

highest entity Akṣarabrahman's nature and form and its ontological distinctness and significance. Akṣarabrahman is also known as Akṣara and Brahman. Moreover, through this section, we will get the answer that why Akṣarabrahman is so significant in the Vedanta studies. The Bhāṣyakāra reveals:

वेदवेदान्तशास्त्रेषु प्रच्छन्नं गूढमक्षरम्।

प्रथममुज्जुघोषात्र स्वमिनारायणो भुवि॥ SSSK 13 ॥

“The entity of Akṣarabrahman was esoteric- almost as if concealed – within the Vedas and *Upaniṣads*. It was revealed to the world for the first time by Svāminārāyaṇa.” The entity of Akṣarabrahman uniquely stands amid all eastern and western philosophy. As we get into the profound discussion, firstly, we should keep this point in our mind that it is not Parabrahman.

As we mentioned, next to Parabrahman, in the order of being an ontological reality is Akṣarabrahman. Parabrahman-Puruṣottama is higher than Akṣarabrahman; and Akṣarabrahman is higher than *māyā-prakṛti*, *īśvara*, and *jīvas*. Akṣarabrahman is frequently addressed merely as ‘Akṣara’ or ‘Brahman’ in the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition.

Just as Parabrahman, the highest reality, is one, unique and matchless, so is Akṣarabrahman one, unique and matchless by his distinctive characteristics and glory, in comparison to other mats subservient to him. Of course, both Akṣara (Brahman) and Puruṣottama (Parabrahman) are distinct realities, of which the former is eternally dependent on Parabrahman while later is ever the only independent; nevertheless, Akṣarabrahman shares eternal togetherness with Puruṣottama on account of his highest love, devotion, and servitude unto Him. Besides Parabrahman, he alone is eternally free from the trace of three *guṇas* of *māyā-prakṛti* and was never in bondage, and hence free eternally. Thus, Akṣarabrahman is one and unique. It is a class by itself. It is a one-membered class, totally self-same. Akṣarabrahman is always referred to as uniquely one and only one.

The *Śruti* declares that the knowledge of Akṣarabrahman is the *paravidyā*. “*Para yaya tad Akṣaram adhigamyate*” “and the higher than that (all other arts and sciences is the knowledge) by which the imperishable Akṣarabrahman is apprehended. Similarly, the importance of Akṣarabrahman is implied, according to Svāminārāyaṇa in the opening verse of the *Bhāgavatam* thus: “*Dhamna svena sada nirasta kuhakam satyam param dhimalhi.*” (BP 1/1/1) “God is the Supreme Truth/Reality, who through His abode, the Akṣarabrahman (i.e., by making a seeker similar to Akṣarabrahman/*dhāma*) has dispelled the darkness (ignorance) born of *māyā* enveloping them. More or less on the same line, the *Śruti* also asserts that – “*Pranavo dhanuh saro hyhatma brahma tallaksyamucyate. Apramattena veddhavyam garavattanmayo bhavet.*” (MU 2/2/4) Pranava (AUM/ mystic syllable) is the bow. The *ātman* is the arrow and Brahman is the target. It is to be hit, i.e., meditated upon by a man who is undistracted, and then as the arrow becomes one with the target, he will get lost in the (Para)Brahman. Here, the word ‘Brahman’ as target refers to Parabrahman resting in an abode called Akṣarabrahman, Thus, it refers to both, because it speaks of becoming one with Akṣarabrahman (becoming like Akṣara) and getting lost lovingly in Parabrahman.

Brahman and Parabrahman, for the attainment of *brahmavidyā* both, are necessary. Akṣarabrahman is the most powerful medium to be eligible in the service of Puruṣottama. One who becomes like Akṣarabrahman alone can find a place at the feet of Parabrahman. In this way, both Brahman and Parabrahman are essential as the goal of *brahmavidyā*. Akṣarabrahman is unchanging (*nirvikara*) and indivisible (i.e., partless = *niramśa*), Akṣarabrahman is the substratum of everything including Mūlapuruṣa, Mūlaprakṛti, and the products thereof, and he is immanent in them by his power of permeation. Therefore, very often, Akṣarabrahman is described as everything (*sarvarūpa*). Akṣara is smaller than the smallest, and (but for Puruṣottama) is immanent in everything. Save Puruṣottama, Akṣara is bigger than the biggest. These two

respectively are the *nirguṇa* and the *saguṇa* aspects of the same Akṣarabrahman.

Svāminārāyaṇa narrates elaborately that, Akṣarabrahman is steady (*acala*), stable (*kūṭastha*), unwaning (*avyaya*), steadfast (*dhruva*), and unmanifest (*avyakta*). Akṣarabrahman indwells in the hearts of all sentient selves (*jīvas* and *īśvara*) as the micro-abode wherein Puruṣottama (Parabrahman) resides as the witness and the Inner Self of all, and hence, he too, at times, is described as witness and *antaryāmīn*.

Akṣarabrahman is of the nature of the truth-existence-consciousness, unlimited, infinite, all-pervading, partless, imperishable, and eternal. It is the abode, the divine residence of Parabrahman. In its formful-personal aspect, he is eternally in the service of God, and in its formful-personal aspect, it is the abode of God. Akṣarabrahman is pure, eternally accomplished, unchanging-stable, illuminator of *māyā*, etc., and the support of all the abodes and universes, therefore, this Akṣarabrahman ought to be known. The scriptures also endorse the view that the same Akṣarabrahman has four forms, with which it expresses variously. Akṣarabrahman is spoken of as one full of consciousness, of the nature of knowledge. Eternal in character, of the nature of bliss and has the capacity to present (itself) in different forms.

4.1 Akṣarabrahman is not Parabrahman

Akṣarabrahman is a different entity from Parabrahman. We investigate a major clue to the answer in the *Vacanāmṛta* where Svāminārāyaṇa states: “Puruṣottama Parabrahman is greater even than Akṣara who is greater than all else.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/64, p.154). Svāminārāyaṇa explains further that Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is different from Akṣarabrahman and is also the cause, support, and

inspirer of him.²³⁸ Parabrahman is, therefore, still superior to Brahman, and the ultimate cause of all, including Akṣarabrahman. Svāminārāyaṇa emphasizes this fact invariably in the *Vacanāmṛta*. We will take a glance at a few of these in the section on Parabrahman as Akṣarātīta. As a recapitulation, here is one such declaration: “This manifest form of Puruṣottama Parabrahman Bhagavān before your eyes is the controller of all, including Akṣara. He is the lord of all *īśvaras* and the cause of all causes. He reigns supreme.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/38, p.664). The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra confirms this view through the *Prasthānatrayī*.

In his analysis he indicates that Akṣarabrahman in other ways also, (Akṣarabrahman) is within and without the beings; and also is mobile and immobile. All-pervading all-supporting form of Akṣarabrahman which is within and without universes and beings therein. Akṣarabrahman is eternally the chief among the devout attendants of Lord Puruṣottama; he is the ideal devotee nearest and dearest to Him; he is eternally best personal page and devotee of God, has the enchanting personality with the most attractive-symmetrical limbs, face, etc. In short, he is a formful-personal servant with supreme devotion. He enjoys God’s predilection, love, bliss, favored of God’s sovereign powers to the highest degree; for he embodies nothing but God and God alone fully in his person, from eternity.

Akṣarabrahman is *vibhu* or infinitive like Nārāyaṇa (Parabrahman). Ontologically and functionally Akṣarabrahman is different from Parabrahman and subordinate to Him; nevertheless, psychologically and lovingly (devotionally) he is one with Him. Though one and only one Without a second, Akṣarabrahman serves Lord. The relationship of Akṣarabrahman to Parabrahman is the eternal relationship of the supreme devotee and the Supreme Godhead. Akṣara is the eternal ‘*sevaka*’ (attendant), ‘*uttama bhakta*’ (supreme devotee).

²³⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/3

Akṣara is dependent on Puruṣottama, but not the sense in which the *jīvas*, the *īśvaras*, and the *māyā-prakṛti* are. On careful study and examination, we find that they are dependent both on Akṣara and Puruṣottama. Only Akṣara and Puruṣottama are beyond and bereft of *māyā-prakṛti* from eternity. God is the only redeemer and Akṣara is an eternally free mediator and necessary model to be modeled, for the *jīvas* and *īśvara* aspiring to attain freedom. On the contrary, Mūlaprakṛti which is the accessory of God, rests dormant in its contracted (unmanifest) state in the infinitesimal small portion of Akṣara during the state of total dissolution. And Akṣara, being transcendent to Mūlaprakṛti, is always untouched and untainted by it. So, the question of bondage does not arise in case of Akṣara; while *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are beginning hardly bound by the fetters of *māyā*. Akṣara is distinct from and superior to the liberated souls (*akṣararnuktas* including Mūlapuruṣa) and Mūlaprakṛti. They are like tiny sparks before Akṣara. Akṣara has no desire to be fulfilled and has no will of his own. The will of God (his Master's) is his will. His will is never different from God's will.

Since Akṣarabrahman is eternally in communion with Parabrahman by the relationship of supreme love and oneness. Akṣarabrahman is the chief (eternal) among the eternal *jīvas* and *īśvaras* and *māyā-prakṛti*, the conscious among conscious being. When perfect affiliation and oneness (union) with that manifest transcendental form of God occurs through the medium of Akṣara-Guru, the devotee acquires brahmanhood and thus attains the place in His abode. The attainment of Brahmaloka (Akṣaradhāma), is the attainment of the highest (Parabrahman), for both are called *paramapada*. Of course, Parabrahman, as the transcendental Absolute certainly can yield brahmanhood to *jīva* even without the intercession (mediation) of Akṣara-Guru.

4.1.1 The *Upaniṣad*

The *Upaniṣads* variously, and hence, express Brahman as - (i) *Dhṛtmān* i.e. the permanent abode of God, (ii) *Sarvottama Sevaka-bhakta* i.e. the best devotee-attendant of God coeval with Him from eternity, (iii) the Akṣara-Guru i.e. the Parama

Ekantika Satpuruṣa working as the medium of God's continuous (ceaseless) manifestation on earth, Akṣarabrahman as the Guru (in perpetuating succession) embodies God fully in his person and God too keeps His manifestation perennial through the person of Akṣara-Gurus in succession. Thus as '*Pragata Brahmasvarūpa*' (the Akṣara-Gurus) is the inheritor and transmitter of tradition set forth by God Himself, and he works as the fulfiller of His mission and discharger of the duty of purifying the souls and linking them with God to attain final emancipation. (iv) *Sarvadhāra* - *Cidākāśa* i.e., infinite, all-pervading, all-supporting consciousness – space. Thus, out of five ways of expressing or serving God (Parabrahman), Akṣara Brahman's form may be broadly divided into two main categories. The first three (aforesaid) forms refer to- (i) Formful-personal (*sakṛti* / *murtam*) form of Akṣarabrahman, while (ii) the last - maybe clubbed under a single category of Formless- impersonal (*nirakṛti* or *amurtam*) form of Akṣarabrahman.

The *Śruti* reveals एतद्वै सत्यकाम परं चापरं च ब्रह्म यदोङ्कारः ।तस्माद्विद्वानेतेनैवायतनेनैकतरमन्वेति ॥ PU 5/2 ॥
 “That which is the sound of *Aum*, O *Satyakāma*, is verily the higher and lower Brahman.” The term ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ varifies the distinction between Parabrahman and (Akṣara)Brahman, certainly when the fruits meditating on ‘*Aum*’ is described as procuring ‘either’ (*ekataram*) of them.” In this way, the *Upaniṣads* invariably claim about two Brahman: lower and higher. First, we will ponder upon the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* meticulously. The *mantra* is: अक्षरात् परतः परः (MU 2/1/2)
 “Parabrahman is greater even than Akṣara, the greatest.” Bhadreśadāsa comments:
 “तथा च तादृशजीवेश्वरमायाऽक्षरमुक्तादिसर्वपरभूताद् अक्षरात्पूर्वं परविद्याऽधिगम्यतयोक्तादक्षराख्यदिव्यतत्त्वादपि हि अवश्यमेव परः परभूतः, तादृशमहिमविशिष्टब्रह्मणोऽपि नियामकस्तत्त्वामी तत्प्रेरकस्तदाधारस्तच्छरीरी चेत्यादिरर्थः। सः पुरुषः परमात्माऽस्तीति योज्यम्। इत्थं ब्रह्मणोऽपि परत्वात्परब्रह्मेति परमात्मनोऽन्वयैव संज्ञा। अक्षरब्रह्मणश्च तत्परभूतपरमात्मानं विहायैव, तदतिरिक्तेभ्यः सर्वेभ्यो यत्परत्वं तदपि। परमात्मेच्छायत्तमिति सिद्धम्।” (MUSB 2/1/2, p. 260)

To understand this passage from the *Bhāṣya*, we first provide the background of this *Upaniṣad*. The MU 1/1/5 describes the higher knowledge in the form of Akṣarabrahman. The instantly following verse describes ‘Akṣara’ as “Invisible, inadmissible, without lineage and without caste, without eyes or ears, and without hands or feet; eternal, pervading, omnipresent and exceedingly subtle.”

In the conclusion: “That which is immutable, the wise perceive as the source of all beings.” (MU 1/1/6) The other remaining verses in this first part of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* continue to illustrate that ‘Akṣara’. The MU again assert the power of creation of Akṣara, “This is the truth: As from a blazing fire, sparks of like form issue forth by the thousands, similarly, O dear (Śaunaka), beings of various forms issue forth from Akṣara and coming back to it only.” (MU 2/1/1)

Instantly thereafter, “अक्षरात् परतः परः” (MU 2/1/2) explains that, “Than the superior Akṣara Parabrahman is superior.” This seemingly simple phrase, Bhadreśadāsa argues, holds the key to solving a correct, consistent reading of the entire *Muṇḍaka* and perhaps other texts too.

Describing ‘Akṣara’ that also is an adjective that qualifies Puruṣa and means ‘high’. and that ‘*parataḥ*’, an indeclinable adjective also meaning ‘high’. The word ‘Akṣara’ has been taken from the verb ‘*ksin*’ meaning ‘to wane’ or ‘to perish’. The negating ‘a’ prefix thus indicates “Akṣara ‘imperishable’”. But even so, the term can equally serve as an adjective and a proper noun, just as ‘green’, for example, English can refer to the actual color green, the quality describing something of brown color and Mr. Green, respectively. Which of these applies to ‘Akṣara’ in the phrase above? The MU declares Brahman as a different entity. This appears to be a straight translation of the phrase in MU 2/1/2.

4.1.2 The *Brahmasūtra*

Interestingly, the *Adṛśyatvādhikaraṇa* (BS 1/2/21–24) asserts, “‘यत्तदद्रेश्यमग्राह्यम्’ (MU 1/1/6) इति वेदान्तवाक्यस्य परमात्मभिन्ने अक्षरब्रह्मणि एव दिव्यतत्त्वे समन्वयं साधयामास त्रिसूत्र्या इति सर्वं समञ्जसम्।” (BSSB 1/2/24, p.79) “That which is invisible and inadmissible, etc., are the qualities of Akṣarabrahman which is divine and distinct from Parabrahman. We have synchronized with the starting point *trisūtraya*.” It takes its cue from the opening of MU 1/1/6. Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman are concluded here as imperishable, invisible, omniscient, and the cause of the universe, yet Akṣarabrahman is different from Parabrahman.

Bhadreśadāsa remarks on those who do not know about the entity of Akṣarabrahman and hence have a weakened knowledge of the actual words of the sacred texts. “सकलप्रपञ्चपरभूताद् अक्षरशब्दवाच्याद् ब्रह्मणोपि परः पुरुषशब्दवाच्यः पुरुषोत्तमस्ततो भिन्न एवेति हि तत्रत्यः सिद्धान्तः।” (BSSB 1/1/1, p.6) “Parabrahman referred here with the word ‘*puruṣa*’ is distinct from Brahman who is mentioned with the word ‘*akṣara*’. It is the foremost principle scripted in the MU 2/1/2.” When we ponder upon the subject matter of the *Brahmasūtra*, and look at a semantically consistent interpretation, throughout the *Upaniṣad* mantras, which possibly reveal only the principles of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, because they believe that Akṣarabrahman is distinct from Parabrahman and subordinate to him. Sequentially, for the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* and other *Upaniṣads*²³⁹ help canonically valid this distinction between Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. Along with this, the उभयव्यपदेशाधिकरणम् (BS 3/2/26-29, pp. 302-304) and पराधिकरणम् (BS 3/2/30-35, pp.304-310) elaborate the ontological distinction of these two entities.

²³⁹ KU 3/11, 6/8; TU 2/1/1, PU 5/2 etc.

4.1.3 The Bhagavad-Gītā

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* also reflects the distinction of the above-mentioned two entities. There are two factors that I was allured to investigate the eighth chapter of the BG for our subject matter of Akṣarabrahman as a distinct entity from Parabrahman; first, the *Bhagavad-Gītā* has *Brahmavidyā* as its running theme; and second, the eighth chapter is focused on Akṣarabrahman, hence titled ‘*Akṣarabrahmayoga*’. The chapter starts with Arjuna’s questions is: “किं तद् ब्रह्म?” (BG 8/1) “What is ‘Brahman’?” The reply begins with a brief solution in BG 8/3.

The answer was: “अक्षरं ब्रह्म परमम्” In this verse, with ‘*parama*’ means ‘greatest’. This adjective of Brahman appears everywhere in the text. Similarly, Parabrahman is mentioned as the greater than the greatest Akṣarabrahman. This authenticates Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman as two distinct entities and that the former is superior to the latter. In this context, Bhadrēśadāsa firstly explains in BG 8/3 that “The entire *Gītā* is instilled with (the *siddhānta* of) Brahman and Parabrahman.” After analyzing the ‘*Akṣarabrahmayoga*’ we discuss now ‘*Puruṣottamayoga*’. It reveals:

द्वाविमौ पुरुषौ लोके क्षरश्चाक्षर एव च।

क्षरः सर्वाणि भूतानि कूटस्थोऽक्षर उच्यते॥ BG15/16 ॥

This means there are two types of persons (*Puruṣa*) in this world - ‘*kṣara*’ and Akṣara’. All beings are *kṣara* (literally, perishable) whereas ‘Akṣara’ is said to be immutable (*kūṭastha*; immovable, as if braced on or like an anvil) the *uttama Puruṣa* (highest person) is different (from the above two). This highest person is described in the next verse. He - is Parabrahman, also known as Parabrahman supports the entire universe. He the greatest; greater than both ‘*kṣara*’ and ‘Akṣara’ again, we find sermons in the *Vacanāmṛta* that closely agree with the metaphysical description and juxtaposition from the BG verses above. For example: “And what is *Puruṣottama* like? He transcends both *kṣara* and Akṣara.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/31,

p.647). Bhadreśadāsa argues simply that Puruṣottama is “अक्षराद् अपि पूर्वोक्तसर्वविधबद्धमुक्तजीवेश्वरमायादिभ्योऽपि सदैवऽत्यन्तोत्कृष्टात् साक्षादक्षर- ब्रह्मणोऽपि उत्तमः उत्कृष्टः” (BGSB 15/18, p.316) “Parabrahman transcendent *jīva*, *māyā*, *īśvara*, and Brahman due to his highest supremacy among all others.” Parabrahman is always accompanied by Akṣarabrahman, and when He descends on earth, Akṣarabrahman: the supreme servitor too is together with Him. In short, wherever Svāminārāyaṇa is there, whether we speak of Him as a resident in highest abode, or as *Antaryāmīn* in the heart of all as their Inner Self, or as the incarnate God on earth or in the form of Icon; He is together with Akṣarabrahman and hence, legitimately the ‘Svāminārāyaṇa’ mantra implies ‘Akṣara with Puruṣottama’.

Puruṣottama Parabrahman does not exist without (away and apart from) Akṣarabrahman: the best devotee-attendant; and Akṣarabrahman cannot be conceived away and apart from Parabrahman-Puruṣottama. The two icons (*murtis*) of Akṣara and Puruṣottama seen in the central shrines of Akṣara-Puruṣottama Svāminārāyaṇa temples are likely to give an impression of a belief in ‘combined worship’ of both. But Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta does not advocate the concept of dual or composite worship, because the supreme object of worship is Puruṣottama alone both here and hereafter. As such the maximum that one can attain is the similarity (*sādharmya*) with Akṣara, but one can never become perfectly equal or identical to Puruṣottama because of the attributes and excellence of God’s transcendence exclusively rests with Him alone eternally.

One who serves the supreme devotee with honor and devotion equal to God attains his spiritual goal quicker by the grace of God. Just as one pleases a child and having pleased his father; in the like manner you please the choicest devotee of God, and the Puruṣottama is pleased all the more. With this understanding in view, Akṣara and Puruṣottama are devoutly tended and propitiated together, because Puruṣottama has promised to cut asunder the ties of bondage much faster,

which otherwise would take several births to get rid of. This is the reason why, Puruṣottama, the only object of worship is honored and adored along with His best and closest companion-devotee, who is the ideal like whom every seeker of God likes to become.

4.2 The Nature of Brahman

4.2.1 The Creator, Sustainer, and Destroyer of the Universe

As we discussed that Akṣarabrahman is the cause of the world, he is not only a material cause but also an efficient cause like Parabrahman. Such all power of Akṣarabrahman is due to the will of Parabrahman. “Akṣarabrahman is the cause and support of all, including Prakṛti-Puruṣa, etc. and pervades everything by its *antaryāmīn* powers ... Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is distinct from that of Brahman and also the cause, support, and inspirer of Brahman.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/3, p.391)

Svāminārāyaṇa school of Vedānta interprets the first aphorism of the *Brahmasūtras*, where ‘Brahman’ in ‘अथातो ब्रह्मजिज्ञासा’ (BS 1/1/1) “अक्षरब्रह्मपरब्रह्मेति दिव्योभयतत्त्वयोर्जिज्ञास्यमानत्वेन विवक्षितत्वात्” (BSSB 1/1/1, p.4) “*Brahmajijñāsā*” notes both Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman as the subject of knowing.” The second aphorism of the *Brahmasūtras*, ‘जन्माद्यस्य यतः’ “*Janmādyasya yataḥ*” (BS. 1/1/2), “अक्षरपुरुषोत्तमाभ्यामस्य प्रपञ्चस्योत्पत्तिस्थितिप्रलयाः प्रभवन्ति” (BSSB 1/1/2, p.13) “The entire universe is created, sustained, and destroyed by Akṣara and Puruṣottama.” The origination, sustenance, and dissolution of this universe are due to ‘Brahman’. Here the term ‘Brahman’ denotes both Brahman and Parabrahman. Akṣarabrahman thus creates, sustains, and destroys the world immutably, blamelessly, and effortlessly. Therefore, it is known as the cause in the *Upaniṣads*.

Moreover, in some cases, Bhadreśadāsa explains, “All this (the visible world) is verily Brahman, from which it comes forth, in which it is dissolved, and by which it lives (*taj-jalān*). This is how, tranquil, one should offer *upāsanā* to it.” (CU 3/14/1) “In the beginning, there was only this Brahman ... From that, all that was created.” (BU 1/4/10) “O dear (Śvetaketu), all these beings have ‘*Sat*’ as their source, ‘*Sat*’ as their support, and ‘*Sat*’ as their resting place.” (CUSB 6/8/4)

In the BU, Gārgī first asks permission from the scholars and Yājñavalkya in the assembly and put the serious questions: “O Yājñavalkya, what is that which is on top of the sky and beneath the earth, and between both the sky and earth and that which is called the past, present and the future? Upon what is all this woven back and forth?” (BU 3/8/3) In answer to her question, Yājñavalkya firstly replies that it is ‘*ākāśa*’. Again further, Gārgī asks: “Upon what is ‘*ākāśa*’ woven back and forth? (BU 3/8/7). It is then that Yājñavalkya affirms: “That, O Gārgī, is in fact what the knowers of Brahman proclaim as Akṣara.” (BU 3/8/8) Brahman or Akṣara is thus the substratum upon which all of remains stable.

Thus, Akṣarabrahman is described as the most powerful administrator after Parabrahman in the *Upaniṣads*. The verse reads: “Within the governance of this Akṣarabrahman, O Gārgī, do the upheld sun and moon verily stand. Within the governance of this Akṣara, O Gārgī, do the upheld ether and earth verily stand. Within the governance of this Akṣara, O Gārgī, do the upheld moments, hours, days and nights, half-months, months, seasons, and years verily stand. Within the governance of this Akṣara, O Gārgī, do the rivers flow - some to the east from the white (snowy) mountains, others to the west in their own directions. Within the governance of this Akṣara, O Gārgī, do recipient men praise donors, deities (praise) the patron, and forefathers (praise) the ancestral offering.” (BU 3/8/9)

Bhadreśadāsa illuminates that these are just a few symbolic features of the entire universe; it should thereby be understood that Akṣarabrahman supports and governs all beings and things of the universe. It should be emphasized again that here and wherever else the governance and causality of Akṣarabrahman are mentioned, Bhadreśadāsa strongly writes that Akṣarabrahman's such power is due to the 'eternal wish of Parabrahman'.

4.2.1 *Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam*

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*'s *Anandavallī* describes the characteristics of Akṣarabrahman. It reads: “सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म” (TU 2/1/1) “Reality, knowledge, and infinitives are the basic form and qualities of Brahman.” These are the three important definers of Brahman as Bhadreśadāsa explains:²⁴⁰

When we analyze this phenomenon, the outcoming of this examination explicitly suggests the nature of Brahman and its distinction from Parabrahman. Here we will mull over the salient features of Brahman as understood within the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedānta. Akṣarabrahman is the second-highest entity that pervades all except Parabrahman, transcendent to *jīva*, *īśvaras*, and *māyā*.²⁴¹ Like Parabrahman Akṣarabrahman is also immutable and beyond *māyā*.²⁴² Akṣarabrahman is a mediator to connect *jīvas* and *īśvaras* to Parabrahman and is capable of granting liberation to them.²⁴³

4.3 Forms of Akṣarabrahman

Akṣarabrahman is one entity, described as 'one without second'. Though it serves or works in four different ways. We highlight these four forms here:

²⁴⁰ TUSB 2/1/1, p.362

²⁴¹ MU 2/1/2, KU 3/11

²⁴² BG 15/16

²⁴³ KU 3/2

1. As *Cidākāśa*. The all-pervading conscious space: supporting countless millions of *brahmāndas*.
2. As Akṣaradhāma. The abode of Parabrahman: the divine, luminous Akṣaradhāma, a place. Parabrahman, *sevaka* Akṣarabrahman, and *akṣara-muktas* live there forever.
3. *Sevaka* Akṣarabrahman. Human-like divine form in Akṣaradhāma: the ideal and staunch devotee of Parabrahman.
4. *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru on earth. Parabrahman manifests in him as a human, the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* get liberation through his association.

These all four forms are mentioned explicitly in one *mantra* of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*: “आविः संनिहितं गुहाचरं नाम महत्पदमत्रैतत् समर्पितम् । एजत्प्राणन्निमिषच्च यदेतज्जानथ सदसद्वरेण्यं परं विज्ञानाद्यद्वरिष्ठं प्रजानाम् ॥” (MU 2/1/1) Bhadrēśadāsa explains this *mantra* in his commentary: “आविः आविर्भूतम् अभिव्यक्तस्वरूपमितियावत् (साकृतिकाक्षरधाम, धामस्थासेवकरूपेण, प्रकटगुरुरूपेण), संनिहितं सर्वपदार्थसंबद्धम्। चिदाकाशरूपेण सर्वव्याप्तत्वात्... महत्पदं गन्तव्यस्थान्भूतमक्षराधिपतेः नित्यनिवासभूतदिव्यदेश-विशेषात्मकमक्षरधामाख्यं पदम् ... अत्रैतत् समर्पितं दिव्याक्षरधामाख्यपदे एतद् एतदेवाक्षरं ब्रह्म स्वरूपान्तरेण समर्पितं पुरुषोत्तमसेवायां समर्पितं... एजत् चलद् नैकजीवेश्वरोद् दिधीर्षया तत्तद् ब्रह्माण्डेषु मनुष्याकृतिनाऽवतीर्य गुरुरूपेण भक्तहिताय विचरदित्यर्थः।” (MUSB 2/1/2, p. 268)

Let us understand it word by word: “*Āviḥ*, meaning ‘manifest, is Akṣarabrahman as the abode, *sevaka*, and Guru, all of which have definite form; whereas ‘*sannihitam*’, or ‘concomitant’, is Akṣarabrahman all-pervading form, i.e., *cidākāśa*. *Mahatpadam* means that Akṣarabrahman is a specific paramount place. Not only that but ‘*atra*’ in that Akṣaradhāma ‘*etat*’ that very Akṣarabrahman is ‘*samarpitam*’ devoted to the service of Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa.” The verse concludes with the instruction: “Know that Akṣara, which is both gross and subtle, the most desirable, the because of its extraordinary knowledge, and what people most desire.” (MU

2/2/1) These four are then individually referred to in the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* verse, as shown in the table below.

Akṣarabrahman Form	Term/Phrase	Meaning
<i>Cidākāśa</i>	<i>guhācaram</i>	dwelling within the cave (of the heart)
Abode	<i>mahat padam</i>	great place
<i>Sevaka</i> in Abode	<i>atraitat samarpitam</i>	dedicated here (in the great place)
Guru	<i>ejat prāṇan nimīṣat</i>	moving, breathing, blinking

Now to understand each of these four forms of Akṣarabrahman in more detail, we proceed further.

One Without Second: Svāminārāyaṇa explains, that “Parabrahman is like this, and these are the rewards of engaging in the worship of Parabrahman and listening to religious discourses. Akṣara is like this, and the bliss associated with him is like this.” (Vac. Loyā. 17, p.343) In the *Vedarasa*²⁴⁴ and *Svāmīnī Vāto*²⁴⁵, too, the same singular personal pronoun in Gujarati (*evo*) is used when discussing Akṣarabrahman. The *Bhagavad-Gītā* also mentions this singularity in 15/16, this is also noted in for example, where ‘*kūṭasthah*’ used to define Akṣara is in the singular case whereas ‘all (other) beings’ (*sarvāṇi bhūtāni*) is in the plural.

4.3.1 Akṣarabrahman as *Cidākāśa*

As we know, Svāminārāyaṇa explains in the *Vacanāmṛta* that Akṣara, when of the four forms of Akṣarabrahman, the only one without a fixed shape is *Cidākāśa*. “Formless (*nirākāra*) and pure consciousness (*Caitanya*), is known as *Cidākāśa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/21, p. 62) Akṣarabrahman, in this manner, is also known in its *anvaya*

²⁴⁴ VR 213-4

²⁴⁵ SV 5.177

(immanent) form described in Vac. Gadh. 1/7 and the *nirguṇa* (subtle) form described in Vac. Gadh. 2/42. In both these senses, *Cidākāśa* is described as being all-pervading.

As the all-pervading, all-supporting consciousness-space, Akṣarabrahman is greater than all, including Mūlapuruṣa and Mūlaprakṛti and the evolutes thereof. It is involved in everything as an extremely subtle finer principle which is both the support (foundational ground) of all and the space immanent in everything. This all-pervading ground of all the subservient elements is the ‘*Cidākāśa*’ aspect of Akṣarabrahman. *Cidākāśa* also is the eternal expression of Akṣarabrahman. As the immanent support and substratum of an innumerable number of universes, Akṣarabrahman is called as *sarvādhāra*. This form of Akṣarabrahman pervades everywhere and permeates in everything, and is immanent within and without the universes. Thus, Akṣarabrahman is not only transcendental ground or cause i.e., uninvolved source and support of an infinite number of brahmāndas consisting of animate and inanimate beings therein; but also immanent all-pervading principle within and without everything.

Akṣara as *Cidākāśa* is immanent in everything. In every atom and also in subatomic particles, it is immanent. Akṣara as *Cidākāśa* is imperishable, unwaning, unchanging, eternal infinitely all-pervading ground and support of everything. It is not subject to production and destruction (evolution and involution/dissolution) like ordinary ether which is a product of *tamoguṇa* aspect of *prakṛti*. *Cidākāśa* is illuminating. It is beyond evolutionary and involucional changes. Every material particle, every psycho-physical body, and every universe and its presiding *īśvara* - up to Mūlaprakṛti and Mūlapuruṣa, has it is being sustained in and by all-pervading, all-supporting foundational *Cidākāśa*. It is immanent within and without an infinite number of universes (cosmic-shells = *brahmāndas*). The association and dissociation (union and disunion) of *pradhāna* (lower *prakṛti*) and *puruṣa*, and also of Mūlaprakṛti and Mūlapuruṣa and

accordingly their expansion and contraction for evolutionary purpose takes place in this all-pervading medium called *Cidākāśa*. Since each *brahmānda* (cosmic-shell) is ensheathed and enveloped by eight layers of *pṛthivi*, *jala*, *teja*, *vayu*, *akasa*, *ahankara*, *mahattattva*, and *prakṛti*; Akṣarabrahman is the supporter of and the immanent principle in the earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, ego, intellect, *prakṛti*, *puruṣa*, etc. Thus, in short, Akṣarabrahman, by its power of being the all-pervading all-supporting substratum of an infinite number of universes (*brahmāndas*), supports and sustains them. Being infinitely vast, homogeneous, all-pervading *Cidākāśa*, it is not subject to expansion and contraction, because it is ever stable and steadfast. The life and existence of all universes and the beings therein are sustained by this *Cidākāśa* (consciousness-space) which is an immanent ground of all. This aspect or expression of Akṣarabrahman is formless and impersonal; nevertheless, it is concrete, qualified and determinate.

As seen above, Akṣara as *Cidākāśa* is all-pervading and immanent in *māyā-prakṛti* and the products thereof. But despite its immanence in *māyā-prakṛti*, it is totally divine, untouched and untainted by it, for it is eternally transcendent to *māyā-prakṛti* and its three *guṇas*. The transcendental aspect of Akṣarabrahman is formful, personal, qualitative, and determinate; while the immanent aspect of the same (though qualitative) is formless, impersonal, all-pervading all-supporting, illuminating consciousness-space. Glorifying the illimitable vastness of Akṣara as *Cidākāśa*, smaller than the small; that on which all the worlds together with their inhabitants are grounded is this imperishable Akṣarabrahman. In the bosom of that Akṣarabrahman, are seen an infinite number of the assemblage of worlds (*brahmāndas*).

Svāminārāyaṇa makes a distinction between the ever uncreated eternal *Cidākāśa* (consciousness-space) which is unmodified and unchanging and the element evolved from the *tamoguṇa* aspect of *prakṛti* which is modifiable and is subject to contraction and expansion. *Cidākāśa* is one of the forms or expressions of

Akṣarabrahman; while ordinary *ākāśa* is a product of *prakṛti*. Thus, space evolved from the *tamas* aspect of *prakṛti* is the physical space that is subject to change and limitations of space and time; while *Cidākāśa* is beyond it in every respect.

The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, too, elucidates: “This immortal Brahman is verily in front. Brahman is behind. Brahman is to the right and to the left. It is below and above. This Brahman verily pervades the whole world.” (MU 2/2/11) Bhadreśadāsa includes to his commentary: “इत्थम् इदं सर्वमपि प्रपञ्चविस्तारकं विश्वं जगद् ब्रह्मैव ब्रह्माक्षरात्मकमेव” (MUSB 2/2/11, p.280) “In this manner, the entire manifested world is pervaded by Brahman.” The BGSB also states: “तद् अक्षरं ब्रह्म दूरस्थं चान्तिके च व्यापकत्वात्” (BGSB 13/15, p.283) “It is far as well as near since it is all-pervading.” The BSSB says in the *Daharādhikaraṇa*: “तच्चैतदसर्वं चिदकाशाख्ये ब्रह्मणि सुसमन्वेति” (BSSB 1/3/14, p.102) “These all characteristics suit to *cidākāśa* Akṣarabrahman.” The same fact is revealed by the Bhāṣyakāra in the *Daharādhikaraṇa* of BSSB²⁴⁶.

In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, the same discussion is found regarding Akṣarabrahman in 2/2/2. It states: “That which is subtler than the subtle and within which the realms and their inhabitants stay, that is this Akṣarabrahman.” In the same way, the *Katha Upaniṣad* describes that “all realms are supported by it (which is called Brahman)” (KU 5/8), while the *Bhagavad-Gītā* simply calls Akṣarabrahman as the supporter of all beings (*bhūtabhartr*) (BG 13/16) and the supporter of all (*sarvabhartr*) (BG 13/14). In addition to this, Yājñavalkya’s answer to Gārgī in BU 3/8, “It is this Akṣara upon which the whole world is woven back and forth and within the governance of this Akṣara that all is upheld in its proper place, working as it should.”

²⁴⁶ BSSB 1/3/14, p.101-102

A similar declaration can be found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*: “As far as this (material) space extends, so extends the (*dahara*, literally subtle) space within the heart. Within it, rests both the sky and the earth, both fire and air, both the sun and the moon, lightning and the stars. Whatever of this (world) is here and whatever is not - it all rests within this (spiritual space).” (CU 8/1/3) It has emerged as a topic of discussion for the *Daharādhikaraṇa* in BS 1/3/14-23, similarly, in Vac. Gadh.1/46, Svāminārāyaṇa points to at the end of his clarification by denoting to the knowledge of *cidākāśa* as ‘*daharavidyā*’. Notably, Akṣarabrahman is not the material space (*bhautika ākāśa*).

4.3.2 Akṣarabrahman as Parabrahman’s Abode

Akṣarabrahman as the abode (*dhāman*) is variously described oft-repeatedly in scriptures. Let us take a few references into account to substantiate the standpoint. Puruṣottama resides eternally in the Akṣaradhāma. In the land of purest light of the stuff of consciousness-bliss, the Divine Person of Puruṣottama reigns supreme. On the divine throne, He is seated in Akṣaradhāma. In the center of the effulgent light of Akṣaradhāma, on the divine throne, the super-divine personality of Puruṣottama is reigning (seated) eternally.

Svāminārāyaṇa describes the glory of the divine abode thus as: Imagine, as if the whole earth together with all its objects and individuals was made of clean mirroring glass, and all-stars and heavenly bodies shone like the most effulgent Sun, and all of them together would brighten and reflect and illumine the whole gamut; what a beautiful, dazzling and exceedingly bright and glittering the sight it would be! The divine abode of God shines effulgently in the like manner. It is bright and effulgent as if like the lights of billions and trillions of Suns and Moons put together. Its light is indescribable and incomparably matchless, for it is cool, tranquil, pleasantly bearable (enjoyably), and infinitely bright and luminous. This abode of God is eternal, (*nitya*) non-material (*a-prākṛta*), of the nature of existence -

consciousness - bliss, illimitable, and partless (*akhanda*). The *ekāntika-bhakta* (devotee) of God attains it at the end of his body.

Akṣara as an abode is real concrete and qualified. On account of its infinite glory, greatness, and all-pervading vastness, it remains beyond the comprehension of *jīvas*, yogis, gods, and goddesses of the level of *īśvara*. Allegorically speaking, in each pore of the body of Akṣaradhāma billions and trillions of universes (*brahmāndas*) dwell like tiny atoms. The universes (*brahmāndas*) do not become atomic, but they appear as such on account of the infinite glory and greatness of Akṣara. Of course, each *brahmānda* (cosmic shell) is sheathed by eightfold enveloping layers of *prakṛti*, but it appears extremely small and insignificant before the unfathomable greatness of Akṣara. This Akṣarabrahman as the *dhāman* (abode) is formful-personal, but this form is infinitely vast and ultra-macroscopic, and beyond the comprehension of human intellect in terms of size and dimension.

Just as in the royal hall with the decorative pillars of the palace of the regal authority, the king sits on the throne; so is Puruṣottama seated on the divine throne, attended by innumerable released souls, in his abode. It is in this highest abode called Akṣaradhāma, that the innumerable released souls who have acquired similitude with Akṣarabrahman, are seated around the divine throne of Lord Parabrahman-Nārāyaṇa, and are lost in ceaselessly gazing at His most beatific bliss-radiating figure. The divine forms (bodies) of the brahmanized released souls (*Akṣara-muktas*) are truly divine and unimaginably effulgent. The stuff of their body is of the nature of effulgent consciousness-bliss alone; the same as that of the Akṣarabrahman.

Svāminārāyaṇa enunciates in Vac. Gadh. 2/42 about the term, *saguṇa* (vast) and *sākāra* (having a definite shape) form of Akṣarabrahman. It is called Akṣaradhāma, Brahmanahola, Brahmaloaka, and Brahmapura the abode Parabrahman. It is their place of ultimate rest, the final destination, the supreme goal. Svāminārāyaṇa

unequivocally asserts in discourses: “Akṣarabrahman is the abode wherein Parabrahman resides.” (Vac. Pan. 1, p. 352)

In the *Katha Upaniṣad* phrase: “That place which all the Vedas extol ...” (KU 2/15), The Bhāṣyakāra elucidates: “‘पदं ‘तद्विष्णोः परमं पदं’ (कठ. ३/९) इत्युत्तरवाक्येन ऐकार्थ्याद् दिव्यदेशविशेषात्मकं परमात्मनिलयनरूपं च स्थानम्” (KUSB 2/15, p.102) “That is ‘the great abode of Parabrahman’ (KU 3/9); due to this upcoming *mantra*, the word *padam* reflects the divine place where Parabrahman resides forever.” To understand in detail about the *padam*? he explains in BGSB: “तद् यथोक्तमहिमयुतमक्षरं पदं पद्यते गम्यते ब्रह्मरूपैः प्रत्यक्षपरमात्मोपासकैः स्वदेहपातोत्तरमर्चिरादिपथेन प्राप्यते इति पदम्। गन्तव्यस्थानभूतं परमात्मनित्यनिवासरूपं देशविशेषात्मकमक्षरधाम- ब्रह्मलोकादिशब्दव्यपदिष्टं पदम्” (BGSB 8/11, pp.484-485) “The specific paramount place which only the enlightened devotees attain after death through the divine path. Here the *padam* word indicates the divine abode of Parabrahman, Akṣaradhāma.” The BSSB also confirms: “एवं ब्रह्माक्षरगुणयोगवैशिष्ट्यादेवास्य ब्राह्मेण विग्रहेण साक्षाद् मूर्तिमदक्षरब्रह्मणा सह ब्रह्मदेशे परब्रह्मपरमानन्दोपभोगः संगच्छते” (BSSB 4/4/5, p.420) “Only the liberated, who have acquired qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman, attain Akṣaradhāma and there they enjoy the bliss of Parabrahman with Akṣarabrahman.”

Bhadreśadāsa provides a list of references from the Vedas, *Upaniṣad*, and *Bhagavad-Gītā* mentioning Akṣarabrahman as the resident of Parabrahman as well as numerous aspects of its nature. We now have the opportunity to go through these features. Definitely, the most significant aspect of Akṣaradhāma is that at its center sits the human-shaped, transcendental, distinct form of Parabrahman in all his divine and splendid grandeur. “Nevertheless, he himself is still always present in his Akṣaradhāma.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/64, p.517) A perfect description of this eternally resident form of Parabrahman was provided by Guṇātitanand Svāmī.

He states: “That is Puruṣottama Parabrahman, the supreme Śrī Sahajānanda Svāmī (Svāminārāyaṇa) who forever resides in his Akṣaradhāma being served by countless liberated *muktas* and divine powers, where he is blissful in and of himself but out of sheer compassion, accepts the service of Akṣara and all others.” (SV 7/27) Svāminārāyaṇa also illustrates the captivating form of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma, providing a special reference to the abode’s extreme effulgent. “There is an all-transcendent mass of divine light which cannot be evaluated from above, below, or in any of the four directions; that is to say, it is endless. Amid this mass of light lies a large, ornate throne upon which presides the divine form of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Puruṣottama Parabrahman Bhagavān. Countless millions of liberated souls are seated around that throne and enjoy the *darśana* of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Loyā. 14, p.331)

The same narration of the radiant abode of Parabrahman can be found in MU 2/2/10, KU 5/15, SU 6/14, BG 15/6, and CU 3/11/1–3. They assert that even the sun and moon cannot touch Brahman’s luminous glory. For example, “There shines not the sun. There shines not the moon or stars, nor does shine this lightning. How, then, can this fire (shine there)? By it alone being luminous is all else reflected. By its light is all this world illumined.” (KU 5/15, MU 2/2/10, SU 6/14). Svāminārāyaṇa provides a reason in the Vac. for why Akṣaradhāma is unique and transcends other realms. He analyzes: “With the exception of Parabrahman’s Akṣaradhāma, the form of Parabrahman in that Akṣaradhāma and his (liberated) devotees in that Akṣaradhāma, all realms, the devas inhabiting those realms, and the opulence of the devas - everything – is perishable.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/24, p. 448)

Similarly, in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*’s *Anandavallī*, and in the BU 4/3/33, where Yājñavalkya describes to King Janaka the happiness of various realms in ascending order, each a hundredfold greater than the previous, climaxing ultimately with the

supreme bliss of Brahmaloaka. Moreover, by quoting the *Mokṣadharmā*²⁴⁷ Svāminārāyaṇa shows that others realms are so inferior in front of Parabrahman's abode as far as the ultimate bliss is concerned.²⁴⁸ It is explicitly mentioned that by the bliss of abode of God all other creatures survive.²⁴⁹

This abode-form of Akṣarabrahman is in fact formful-personal; Akṣarabrahman is beyond the comprehension of anyone by his senses and intellect, and hence is at times described as 'amurta' (formless/impersonal) in its narrow/deviate sense. The Akṣarabrahman's ultra-macroscopic vast form is greatly emphasized in the *Vacanāmṛta* by Svāminārāyaṇa. It is a form infinitely vaster than the *Viśvarūpa* (cosmic-universal) form of Virat described in the scriptures. The *Bhāgavatam* in its 3/11/39-41 elaborates the same fact thus: That Akṣarabrahman, the cause of all causes, in which all such infinite number of universes ensheathed by eight enveloping layers look like tiny atoms, and that is the transcendental abode of the Supreme Person: Puruṣottama, the eternal residence in an embodied form.

The attainment of this Akṣaradhāma, i.e., the attainment of the place in the service of Puruṣottama in Akṣaradhāma is also called the attainment of the 'paramapada' (the highest goal), because every seeker has the goal that – I too want to find a place in the community of *akṣararūpa mukta*, to eternally serve Puruṣottama in Akṣaradhāma. Akṣara is the eternal abode of God and ultimately the abode of all released souls. Therefore; the attainment of Akṣaradhāma means the attainment of Puruṣottama: highest goal (*paramapada*), i.e., the final release. Also, in the hearts of *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, Akṣara is there as the micro-abode (*daharakaṣa*), wherein Puruṣottama resides as the *antaryāmīn* Inner Self and Inner Controller with His microform personality.

²⁴⁷ *Mahābhārata*, *Śānti Parva* 191/6

²⁴⁸ Vac. Sār. 1

²⁴⁹ BU 4/3/32

Akṣaradhāma is the Supreme Abode. (*paramadhāma*) of Puruṣottama. It transcends an infinite number of worlds born of *prakṛti*, each of which is ensheathed by fourteen material regions (*lokas*), and is enveloped by eightfold covering layers (*āvaraṇa*) and above them encircled by the dark belt of *māyā*. Puruṣottama eternally resides there in His original form. He is always present there, also when he descends on earth in a manifest form perceptible to human eyes. The abode is never empty without His actual presence there.

The limit of the glory, of Akṣarabrahman, is not measurable. His greatness is so vast that human logic and imagination cannot explore it fully. When this is the case concerning Akṣarabrahman, what should one, ever say of his transcendental Puruṣottama, Who is beyond the ken of even the released souls (*muktas*) and the uniquely superior Akṣarabrahman? On the contrary, when Parabrahman Himself cannot know the limits of His own excellence and glory, how, can any mortal ever comprehend! When His greatness does not have the limit, how can it be ever known, because just as the totally non-existent thing like sky-flower can never be known, in the like manner the limit of His infinite glory which does not exist, cannot be known.

The abode of God is variously described in the scriptures by the epithets such as Brahmadhāma, Brahmapura, Paramapada, Paramadhāma, Amṛtaloka, Akṣaradhāma, etc. It is the Paramadhāma and Akṣaradhāma, for it survives as eternal abode also after the final dissolution (*ātyantika-pralaya*) of all universes. It is called *paramapada*, because having reached there, there is no return into the *māyic* world (*samsara*) of bondage and suffering (BG - 8/21). It, therefore, is rightly called Amṛtaloka. It is beyond the veil of *māyā*, of the brightness like a blazing sun. It is beginningless, endless, eternal, imperishable, non-material, divine, of the stuff of ‘existence-consciousness-bliss’ and infinitely illuminating. In short, it is of recallable splendor and grandeur and is self-

luminous and bright, and is of wonderful blessed nature beyond finite imagination.

The scriptures sing the glory of such a self-effulgent and all-illuminating abode. In that abode of Brahman, the sun doesn't shine, nor do the moon and the collectivity of stars. Neither the lightning nor does the fire can ever illumine it, because, by the effulgent light of this Brahmadhāma, the sun, the moon, etc. and the worlds shine. Neither the Sun nor the Moon nor even fire can illumine that highest self-effulgent abode of God, attaining which one never returns to this world of mortality.

Explicitly, Svāminārāyaṇa is not talking here about *Cidākāśa*. It was the narration of Akṣarabrahman as the abode. In this manner, by its size, finality, bliss, timelessness, exclusivity, purity, imperishability, luminance, and other qualities, we have endeavored to comprehend Akṣaradhāma.

4.3.3 Akṣarabrahman as *Sevaka* in Akṣaradhāma

In its personal aspect, Akṣara has a form and personality which resembles that of Parabrahman. It is *puruṣākṛti* (form similar to that of Puruṣottama). Thus, Akṣarabrahman has divine form and personality made up of the stuff called existence consciousness-bliss, and it is endowed with two hands (*dvibhuja*) and two feet (*dvicaraṇa*), in the human frame. However, the *māyic* distinction of male or female does not apply to him, for he is beyond the three guṇas of *māyā-prakṛti*. He is endowed with inconceivable innumerable auspicious qualities and powers; and only Parabrahman (Puruṣottama) transcends him infinitely, as his Lord. The formful Akṣarabrahman is in the human form and is engaged eternally in the service of the highest Lord; whereas that one which is formless exists as the *dhāman* (abode) of the Lord and is partless.

The personal form of Akṣara is the supreme wisdom and supreme devotion personified! He is the supreme ideal of devotion-in-servitude. He is the supreme ideal of devotion-par-excellence. He therefore is adored as the *śreṣṭha-upāsaka*. Akṣarabrahman has *divya-vigraha* (divine body) of the nature of *sat-cid-ānanda*. He too is eternally young like a teen-aged boy, *puruṣākr̥ti* (in the human frame like God-Himself). The *Ekāntika-Dharma* is fully consummated, from eternity, in the person of Akṣarabrahman.

Akṣara is the chief servile devotee and the chief attendant. He is divine, very enchanting personality endowed with hands, feet, face etc., he is *puruṣākr̥ti* (formful like Puruṣottama). Akṣarabrahman ministers to Him with the most intense love, best service, and supreme devotion. For all *jīvas* pursuing the path of devotion, whether bound or liberated, Akṣarabrahman sets the standard to learn how God is to be served with selfless intense love, devotion, and dedication. Akṣarabrahman is the model of the right relationship with God to the *jīvas* seeking salvation.

Akṣarabrahman is engaged in the eternal service of Puruṣottama as the foremost among His servitors. Akṣarabrahman symbolizes the best expression of perfect self-effacement through the loving service of Puruṣottama. Akṣarabrahman, in his personal aspect, is the devotee nearest and dearest to Puruṣottama. Akṣara is the constant companion, choicest devotee and the best attendant of the Nārāyaṇa ever-to be-there with Him. He is endowed with the qualities of consciousness, bliss, truth, infiniteness, etc. in their purest form. Therefore, in the other words, the personal form of Akṣarabrahman is, thus, an eternally existing ideal for the aspirants.

Svāminārāyaṇa now specifically mentions Akṣarabrahman as *sevaka* in Akṣaradhāma, which have a definite form as noted in Vac. Gadh. 1/21: “In its other

form, that Akṣara remains in the service of Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/21, p.62). This form of Brahman always remains in the abode of Parabrahman and indulges in the service of Him. He is an ideal devotee.

The Bhāṣyakāra then clarifies: “Who knows (that Brahman) dwelling in the cavity (of the heart) and in the highest abode, he enjoys all pleasures with the omniscient (*Vipaścit*) Brahman.” (TU 2/1/I) Bhadreśādāsa delves into this phrase in his commentary: “स ब्रह्मसाक्षात्कारी तेनैव दिव्याक्षरधामस्थेन परमात्मपरमसेवकात्मेन विपश्चिता ...ब्रह्मणा दिव्यकरचरणादियुतपुरुषाकारब्रह्मणाक्षरेण सह कामान् कामयन्त इति कामाः परमात्मपरमसुखादिरूपभोगान् अश्रुते भुङ्क्तेनुभवति” (TUSB 2/1/1, p.363) “The *muktas* who have attained liberation experience the supreme bliss of Parabrahman just as the *sevakrūpa* Akṣarabrahman who has a perfect human form does in Akṣaradhāma.” The BSSB explores the fact: “एवं ब्रह्माक्षरगुणयोगवैशिष्ट्यादेवास्य ब्राह्मेण विग्रहेण साक्षाद् मूर्तिमदक्षरब्रह्मणा सह ब्रह्मदेशे परब्रह्मपरमानन्दोपभोगः संगच्छते” (BSSB 4/4/5, p.420) “Only the liberated, who have acquired qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman, attain Akṣaradhāma and there he enjoys the bliss of Parabrahman with Akṣarabrahman who is in a human form there.”

4.3.4 Akṣarabrahman as *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedānta, we had already brought about that a fundamental and unique doctrine. In that Parabrahman is the cause of all *avatāras*. He himself manifests on earth in human form forever to grant liberation to every being. How does this become possible? If Svāminārāyaṇa was only present on earth from 1781 to 1830, how does Parabrahman remain present on earth after leaving his mortal body? Especially, the word *pratyakṣa* (Parabrahman manifest before your eyes) is the answer. *Pratyakṣa* is used by Svāminārāyaṇa invariably, what does this mean? Let us discuss the matter and analyze it in detail in order to answer this question within this section. After a keen investigation into the *Vacanāmṛta*, it becomes evident that Svāminārāyaṇa explained those words ‘Parabrahman manifest

before the eyes’ to remain forever on earth. He explains the profoundly important matter in the *Vacanāmṛta*, “When Parabrahman manifests for the purpose of granting liberation to the *jīvas*, he is always accompanied by his Akṣaradhāma.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/71, pp.173-174)

Akṣarabrahman is the medium through whom God Puruṣottama (after departing from the earth) keeps His manifestation and presence continuous on earth in the form of Akṣara-Guru to redeem the seekers of salvation. Therefore, Akṣarabrahman, who descended on earth along with Lord Puruṣottama, continues to function as the Guru: the appropriate medium for God to work through and remain present (manifest), after His formal departure from this earth. In Guru-paramparā, at each stage, Akṣarabrahman through his alter-form remains perennially present.

Akṣara as the Guru (Parama Ekantika Satpuruṣa) is the purifier and molder of the metal of the *jīva*, and hence, he is conceived as a compassionate mother, as a disciplinarian father, as a tough taskmaster, as a true friend of the soul, as an enlightened philosopher, as an unfailing guide, the Bonafide Spiritual Master who embodies fully the very God whom he serves devoutly. One who seeks refuge at the feet of Akṣara-Guru, and obediently affiliates himself with the Akṣara-Guru becomes *brahmarūpa* a freed soul resembling Akṣarabrahman. The Sruti says: “*brahmavid brahmaiva bhavati.*” (Mund. Up. -3/2/9) “The true knower (realizer) of Akṣarabrahman becomes (similar of) Brahman” and the Sruti further says that, “One who becomes like Akṣarabrahman attains Parabrahman” (TU 2/1/1).

As seen earlier, Akṣara stands closest to God; Puruṣottama and Akṣara are distinct realities, but Akṣara enjoys ‘Supreme Spiritual Union’ and oneness with God. God too does not leave Akṣara and stay alone (solitary); though of course He is capable

of doing so by virtue of His supreme transcendental power. On the contrary, He, as if acts like one enslaved by the loving ties of Akṣara.

Akṣarabrahman is eternally lost intending His God, and God remains lost totally in the person of Akṣara. The divine love and relationship between the two is such that no one leaves the other. The words ‘consort’ or ‘other half’ do not convey the correct and complete relationship, because God always manifests simultaneously fully in the person of Akṣara alone. Both Akṣara and Puruṣottama are *divya-murtis* (divine personalities). The almost equal powers, rights, and privileges that Akṣara enjoys and owes from Puruṣottama are like that of the royal Queen enjoying and owning equal royal authority from His Excellency, The King. Both Akṣara and Puruṣottama are eternally free, devoid of three *guṇas* and are not directly involved in the process of creation. Neither any phase/ aspect/ expression of God nor that of Akṣara unites with *prakṛti* to set the creative process on.

Nonetheless, Parabrahman is the Supreme Godhead and the Parama Guru while Akṣarabrahman is the first Guru in succession and the Guru-paramparā continues through Akṣarabrahman in whom God fully manifests with all His glory, glamour, and grace. Akṣara embodies in him God and God alone fully, works strictly in consonance with the will of God and also presents himself as the ideal devotee teaching the lessons of right devotion and worship through his words and deeds.

Accordingly, the followers of this faith hold the conviction that the present Guru Mahanta Svāmi Maharaja is the currently manifest form of Akṣarabrahman, through whom Puruṣottama manifests on earth and works and redeems the seekers of salvation, Therefore, the Ācārya (the Guru) is the first and the final means for mokṣa, because he and the God are not away and apart. Since the Akṣara-Guru finds the greatest delight and devotion in serving his Lord, he

attunes and affiliates all seekers who approach him, to Puruṣottama, Who is the Supreme Value and the Summum Bonum of all spiritual endeavors. Puruṣottama shapes and secures the *brāhmic* state of Akṣarahood to the seekers, but does it through Akṣara-Guru, who is the appropriate medium and mediator between *jīvas* and Himself, after His departure from this world. So, it is the Lord alone who is the ultimate redeemer and the Supreme Goal and the Supreme Object of worship, here and hereafter.

Svāminārāyaṇa is primarily present in the person of the Guru, also in the images and sacred scriptures. The Guru is spoken of as ‘the sacred texts personified’ because he lives in harmony with all the precepts of the scriptures given by Svāminārāyaṇa. Without such a Guru, it is said, there can be no *satsaṃga*. It is only through association with Akṣara who has come on earth in a personal form that one can get rid of one’s vices, baser instincts, and the clutches of *māyā*, and thereby gain release.

Describing the glory of *paramabhakta* (Akṣara-Guru), Svāminārāyaṇa explains that wherever the best devotee (Akṣarabrahman) goes, the Lord follows him, accompanies him. As the devotee cannot live without Him, so does He cannot live without His best devotee. He does not remain away from the heart of that devotee even for a fraction of a second. Do not mistake him for a mere mortal, though he appears like an ordinary man or a saint. He is worthy of honor and adoration and reverence like God Himself. He (the Akṣara-Guru) is an all-inspirer and all-illuminator. He is the support and substratum of all the universes. Akṣara has sway over Puruṣottama by his ideal subservience and highest devotion par excellence. Akṣara is the intercessor between the bound souls and the almost inaccessible Lord. To seek grace and favor of God, Akṣara the Guru is the only appropriate medium, who is the embodiment of supreme wisdom, highest devotion, motherly love, and affection and concern for creatures.

We, the finite, bound, erring souls are assured of His mercy, final pardon, perfection, highest bliss, and the service of His divine feet through Akṣarabrahman, our first refuge to reach the final goal.

Thus, Parabrahman is always accompanied by Akṣarabrahman and never remains alone on earth; It is this Akṣarabrahman - in another form, the abode of Parabrahman that is the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru on earth. Just as in his eternally distinct form, Parabrahman is fully manifest in his abode called Akṣaradhāma; similarly, on earth, he chooses to dwell in his human abode the same Akṣarabrahman who has assumed the form of the Guru.

This form of the Guru is mentioned in the Vac. As ‘*Sant*’, ‘*Satpuruṣa*’, ‘*Sādhu*’, ‘*Bhakta*’, etc. for example: “When one has the *darśana* of such a *Sant*, one should realize, ‘I have had the *darśana* of Parabrahman himself.”(Vac. Sar. 10, p.226) Svāminārāyaṇa thus, reiterates that Parabrahman is present in and operate through the Guru. In the same way, the *Upaniṣad* reveal the Guru’s metaphysical authorizations as well as the absolute need for such a Guru in order to transcend *māyā* and realize the highest, *Brāhmi* state of enlightenment. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, For example, explains that for *brahmavidyā* one has to go to such Brahman Guru.

“To realize that (higher knowledge of Akṣara (also known as Brahman) Puruṣa (also known as Parabrahman), i.e., *Brahmavidyā*), imperatively render, with sacrificial wood in hand, to only that Guru who has a realization of revealed texts (*Śrotriya*), who is Brahman(*Brahma*) and who is ever steadfast (*Niṣṭha*) (in Parabrahman). (MU 1/2/12) Bhadrēśadāsa comments on this *mantra*: “ब्रह्म साक्षादक्षरं ब्रह्म, निष्ठं नितान्तं नित्यं तिष्ठतीति निष्ठः। कुत्रेत्याक्षेपात् परमात्मनीति लभ्यतेऽतः सदा परमात्मनिष्ठस्तमित्यर्थः। अनेन नित्यं परमात्मनिष्ठः साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मैव ब्रह्मविद्यायाः विज्ञापयिता गुरुर्भवितुमर्हति नान्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्। गुरुं स्वरूपतोऽक्षरब्रह्माख्यतत्त्वाऽत्यन्ताऽभिन्नं नित्यमखण्डिततया सम्यक् सर्वाङ्गे साक्षात् सहजं सहजानन्दपरब्रह्मधारकमत एव तदनवरतप्राक्त्यानुभावकं ‘सम्प्रदायो हि गुरुक्रमः’...

साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपसत्पुरुषमित्यर्थः।” (MUSB 1/2/12, p.254) “Brahman is Akṣarabrahman, ‘*niṣṭham*’ means always having the conviction of Parabrahman. ‘*Niṣṭham*’ normally considered as a single compounded term, Bhadreśadāsa provides the crucial distinction here that the Guru is one not just ‘established in Brahman’ *Brahmaṇi niṣṭhā* but the very form of Brahman (*Brahmasvarūpa eva*). Hence, the correct qualifier for the Guru is ‘*Brahmasvarūpa*’, the form of Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) *Satpuruṣa* and he leads the *Sampradāya* tradition.”

The BGSB also confirms: “तत्त्वदर्शिनाः भगवन्नित्यदर्शनाः सकलशब्दबोध्यपरमतत्त्वपरमात्मसाक्षात्कारवन्तश्च साक्षात्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरवः ते तुभ्यं ज्ञानं ब्रह्मविद्याम् उपदेक्ष्यन्ति” (BGSB 4/34, p.110). “The *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru who has the firm conviction and revelation of Parabrahman can preach *brahmavidyā*.” The BSSB also mentions by referring to the KU 3/2 *mantra* and comments: “अक्षरब्रह्म सेतुः इति तत्प्राप्तिमाध्यमभूतं गुरुरूपं च तत्” (BSSB 1/4/1) “The bridge in the form of Akṣarabrahman is the same Guru who is the means to liberation.” In this way, the *Upaniṣads* repeatedly described the Akṣarabrahman Guru as a ‘*setu*’, or bridge elucidating his role to connect an aspirant to Parabrahman. “The bridge for those who offer sacrifices is Akṣarabrahman, the highest.” (KU 3/2), “This is the bridge to the immortal.” (MU 2/2/5); now, the self (of all) is the bridge... (CU 8/4/1), “The best bridge to immortality ...” (SU 6/19)

As a matter of fact, the supreme glory of God (Parabrahman) is infinite and unfathomable; and hence, never fully comprehensible. However, Akṣara among all dependent conscious beings knows and sings the glory of God to the highest possible extent, and hence, he is popularly designated as the giver of liberation(mokṣa). Being the best *jñānī*, he is glorified by God Himself as His very self (Atman). Jñānī alone is Brahmasvarūpa i.e., Akṣarabrahman, for there exists nothing in his consciousness except God. Therefore, such a *jñānī* (i.e., Akṣarabrahman) is the dearest to God and God has him as the dearest one. Therefore, Akṣarabrahman as the

best *jñānī* alone can unveil the transcendental majesty and supreme glory of Parabrahman in the best possible manner to the greatest possible extent. Through him alone, the best glimpse of God's transcendental glory is revealed to the devotees and seekers of God, who are striving to realize Him. Of course, God, out of grace may reveal Himself directly independently to a spiritual aspirant. We can conclude by saying that Parabrahman is completely present and in the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. The statements containing the words *pratyakṣa* or 'Parabrahman manifest before the eyes' now refer exclusively and forthrightly to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. Although the Guru is an essential entity to attain liberation, yet he is not Parabrahman himself. We will discuss that part in the next chapter of *sādhana*.

5. PARABRAHMAN

The Bhāṣyakāra defines:

परमात्मा परं ब्रह्म सर्वेश्वरेश्वरो हरिः।

नारायणश्च सर्वज्ञः कृपालुः पुरुषोत्तमः॥ SSSK 168 ॥

Parabrahman Paramātmān Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa Śrī Hari is the lord of all lords and the compassionate all-knower. Parabrahman, the sovereign of Akṣara, is eternal, supreme, always divine, faultless, ever with a form, above *māyā*, one and unparalleled and a *cetana* sentient entity. Now we will explore these qualities of Parabrahman in detail.

5.1 One Without Second

This emphasis can be found in the *Vacanāmṛta* on both the peerlessness and uniqueness of Parabrahman or Parabrahman. Quoting this same phrase Svāminārāyaṇa expounds: "Only Parabrahman is like Parabrahman; no one can become like him. The Vedic verse '*ekam evādvitīyam Brahma*' also explains that Parabrahman alone is like Parabrahman. This is the principle of all of the scriptures." (Vac. Loyā. 13, pp. 328-329) Enriching the uniformity of the *Vacanāmṛta*, in the last documented discourse of the *Vacanāmṛta*, where

Svāminārāyaṇa again echoes the singularity of Parabrahman, we also find his argument for a monotheistic system. “Only Parabrahman is like Parabrahman. Many have attained qualities similar to his by worshipping Him, yet they certainly do not become like Parabrahman... Thus, the governor of all activities and the lord of all is one Parabrahman. Not only that, but it also seems that no one can ever challenge Him. Therefore, Parabrahman is definitely one, and no one can become like Him.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/39, p.669)

In this manner, the unequivocal supremacy and uniqueness of Parabrahman is never questioned or undermined. Ontologically, Parabrahman is one, matchless and unsurpassable. He is supreme. The Bhāṣyakāra comments on the *Upaniṣadika* statements, such as CU 6/2/1, which announce Parabrahman as being ‘*eka*’ (one) and *advitīya* (without second): “नहि परमातत्त्वानेकत्वसंभवः, तत्त्वतः एकस्यैव तस्य अनन्तालौकिकाश्चर्यमय-कार्यकरणसामर्थ्यात्।” (CUSB 6/2/1, p.254) “It is not possible that there would be more than one Paramātmān. Infinite miraculous deeds happen through only one ontologically supreme entity Parabrahman.”

In conclusion, we can submit that in all senses of the term, Parabrahman is unique. He is one and a kind, quite literally in a class of his own, *sui generis*. But that in and of itself does not make him supreme, for this description also applies to Akṣarabrahman. Rather, it is by virtue of his infinite greatness the other entity can even approximate him.

5.2 Sarvoparī: Parabrahman as Supreme

5.2.1 Lord and Ātman of All Beings

A frequent keynote found in the *Vacanāmṛta* conveying Parabrahman’s infinite supremacy is a description of Him as the ‘Lord of all lords’ and the ‘king of all kings’ reigning over the entire universe. Svāminārāyaṇa states: “Moreover, all of

the Brahmas, Viṣṇus, and Maheśas of all of the *brahmāndas* pray to Parabrahman, ‘*Mahārāja!* Please have compassion on us and visit our *brahmānda*’ - just as the chief of a village requests the world emperor.” (Vac. Pan. 4, p.369) A list of conclusions appears from this description. Firstly, Svāminārāyaṇa adds an important element to the understanding of Parabrahman as ‘world emperor’ - as not just lording over a vast dominion of land and wealth but having subjects over whom he reigns. He is not merely a landlord but indeed the sovereign emperor.²⁵⁰ The perfect relationship between Parabrahman and the world remains that just as the soul is to its body, so is Parabrahman to the world. And, vice versa, just as the physical body is to its soul, so is the world to Parabrahman; Svāminārāyaṇa often drew upon this relationship to explain that Parabrahman is the ‘omni-soul’ (*sarvātman*) or super *ātman* (Paramātmān) of the entire world while narrating the nature of Parabrahman, That very Parabrahman is the *ātman* of countless *brahmāndas*.²⁵¹ He is the self (*ātman*) of all.²⁵² Applying the body-self analogy, Svāminārāyaṇa firstly explains that Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān is the *ātman* of all *ātman*s.

Moreover, when describing all the material elements of the infinite universe and then adding *īśvaras*, *māyā*, the *muktas* (liberated *ātman*s of Akṣaradhāma) and even Akṣarabrahman, Svāminārāyaṇa counts: “All of these constitute the body of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Gad. 1/64, p. 153) Svāminārāyaṇa acknowledges this to an individual level, mentioning demonstration of what an accurate comprehension of this doctrine would be like just as the *ātman* resides in the body, Parabrahman resides within the *ātman*. The *ātman* is the ‘*śarīra*’ (body), and Parabrahman is the ‘*śarīrin*’ (embodied self of selves). But how exactly is Parabrahman the *ātman* of all these beings and things? Well, Svāminārāyaṇa himself explains that all finite

²⁵⁰ (Vac. Gad. 2/66) (Vac. Gad. 3/37) (Vac. Gad. 3/39)

²⁵¹ Vac. Gad. 2/17

²⁵² Vac. Loyā.7

sentient beings (*ātman*, i.e., *jīvas* and *īśvaras*) and Akṣara constitute the body of Puruṣottama Bhagavān in that they are pervaded, dependent and powerless.²⁵³

The Bhāṣyakāra confirms: “दिव्यमनोहराकृतिः परमात्मसहजानन्दः स्वान्तर्यमनशक्त्या सर्वं नियमयन् तत्तत्स्थानेष्ववतिष्ठते” (BSSB 1/2/14, p.70) “Parabrahman Sahajānanda who has a divine luminous form remains in every sentient and non-sentient being by his controlling power.” Bhadreśādāsa discusses in the BSSB while quoting the subject sentence from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* of the *Yajur Veda*, famously known as the *Antaryāmī Brāhmaṇa*. “The omni-soul, entering within, is the controller of all beings.” (BU 3/7/1) It ends with passages from (BU 3/7/7) (of the *Mādhyandina* recension), The Bhāṣyakāra explains: “सहजानन्दपरमात्मनः सर्वव्यापकत्वतन्निनयन्तृत्वतच्छरीरित्वादिकं श्रूयते” (BSSB 1/2/18, p.73)

“All-pervading, all controller, embodied self, etc., are qualities of Sahajānanda Parabrahman echoed in the scriptures.” Parabrahman Puruṣottama Sahajānanda then, as the *ātman*, becomes the incredibly life-source of the entire world or creation, the cause for its existence and the ontic ground (*ādhāra*) upon which it can work. Just as a physical body expires and once separated from its soul, so, too, the world of spiritual and material realities cannot continue to exist even transitorily without Parabrahman. “At the stage of living, the body is thoroughly incapable of doing anything without the will, knowledge, and strength of the inner self. As the *Kena Upaniṣad* and *Aitareya Upaniṣad*, both confirm: Parabrahman is the Self (*ātman*) of the self (*jīva*) - the ear of the ear, the eye of the eyes, the mind of the mind” (KeU 1/2) - by which it can see, hear, smell, speak and taste (AU 3/1). Consequently, all beings are totally dependent on Parabrahman to enliven, enrich them, and bring them to action.

²⁵³ Vac. Gadh. 1/64

Svāminārāyaṇa describes Parabrahman as ‘*ādhāra*’ (support) of the other entities emphasizing the utter dependence on Parabrahman in a way that, the essential being undergirding all beings, the final reality underlying all things. When we understand Parabrahman as the *ātman* with ‘Parabrahman as the support’ that means they are integral to one another. The Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyakāra explains: “Just as Parabrahman is the *ātman* of ‘*kṣara*’ (i.e. *māyā* and all finite beings²⁵⁴), he is also the *ātman* of Akṣarabrahman ... With his own powers, Parabrahman supports both *kṣara* and Akṣara.” Together, these excerpts provide a clearer picture of the relationship between Parabrahman and the other entities.”²⁵⁵

Svāminārāyaṇa explains this significant difference in Vac. Loyā.13: “If Parabrahman (Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa) wishes, he can eclipse all of the liberated souls of Akṣaradhāma by his own divine light and prevail alone. Also, if he wishes, he can accept the devotion of the liberated souls and reside with them. He can eclipse even Akṣara, in the form of the Akṣaradhāma in which he dwells and presides alone independently. If he chooses, he is capable of supporting the countless liberated souls by his own lordship, without even needing Akṣaradhāma... Through his own lordship, Parabrahman reigns as supreme.” (Vac. Loyā.13, p.327) In this way, Puruṣottama is greater even than Akṣara, who is greater than all else.²⁵⁶ This seems to be a direct translation of the phrase in MU 2/1/2: While a fuller conversation of this *Upaniṣadika* passage “*Akṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ*,” Bhadrēśadāsa comments to highlight the difference between Parabrahman and other entities: “In this way, Akṣara is greater than all the *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, *māyā*, and *akṣaramukta* (liberated *ātmans* in Akṣaradhāma) ... And with Paramātmā being greater (*para*) even than such a great Brahman by virtue of being his controller, master, inspirer,

²⁵⁴ on this discussion in the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya*, see BGSB 13/31–32, p. 290; KUSB 5/11, p.154; and the *Ubhayalingādhikarāṇa* in BSSB 3/2/11–25, pp. 291–302.

²⁵⁵ BGSB 15/16–18, pp.314–316

²⁵⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/64

support, *ātman*, etc. ... it is fitting that Paramātman is also called ‘Parabrahman’ (literally, ‘greater-Brahman’).”²⁵⁷

To add to this, Bhadreśadāsa elucidates why the adjective ‘great (*mahāntama*)’ found in verse 2/22 of the *Katha Upaniṣad* is appropriate in qualifying Parabrahman. He authors: “Parabrahman is great, indeed the best (*utkr̥ṣṭa*), because he is greater even than Akṣarabrahman, who is greater than *prakṛti* (i.e., *māyā*) and its effects, all *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, countless emanations such as Matysa, Kaccha, etc., and countless *akṣara-muktas* who are *Brahmarūpa*.”²⁵⁸ Bhadreśadāsa asserts at several occasions in his commentaries of the Vedānta canon, for example, in commenting on the famous *Upaniṣadika* text “All this is verily Brahman” (CU 3/14/1), he explains: “It is because Paramātman is the controller and soul of everything that statements placing him in identical predication (*sāmānādhikaranya*) with other things can be reconciled. Similarly, when explaining another *locus classicus* from the *Upaniṣad*,²⁵⁹ On “*Tat tvam asi*” (CU 6/8/7), Bhadreśadāsa writes: “Both the terms ‘*tat*’ (that) and ‘*tvam*’ (you) ... are placed in identical predication because ‘*tat*’ pervades, controls, and is the very *ātman* of the entire sentient-insentient world, including ‘*tvam*’.”²⁶⁰ Parabrahman thus pervades, empowers, undergirds, and governs - indeed, he enlivens - the entire world or universe, all the while remaining totally unaffected by and distinct from any of the inadequacies of the entities he ensouls. This body-self relationship again upholds the forthright supremacy of Parabrahman in relation to all these other entities. Ontologically, Parabrahman is the highest, most transcendental entity. As the term ‘*sarvoparī*’ (literally above all), no other being or thing can ever surpass him in any way whatsoever. The *Upaniṣad* proclaims: “There is nothing greater than Param Puruṣa (i.e., Puruṣottama or Parabrahman).”²⁶¹ In this way, *Upaniṣads* use ‘*param*’ or

²⁵⁷ MUSB 2/1/2, p.260

²⁵⁸ KUSB 2/22, p.118

²⁵⁹ CU 3/14/1, p.133

²⁶⁰ CU 6/8/7, p.278

²⁶¹ KU 3/11, SU 3/9, PU 6/7

Puruṣa (supreme or best). Apart from this other terms found in the *Upaniṣad* and *Bhagavad-Gītā* that describe Parabrahman's pre-eminent position include 'uttama' (highest or best), 'utkr̥ṣṭa' (best), 'śreṣṭha' (best) and 'kāstā' (ultimate).^{262 263}

5.2.2 Source of All *Avatāras*

Guṇātitanand Svāmī, Svāminārāyaṇa's most prominent pupil, successor and the preacher of the *Svāmīni Vāto*, explains this ontological distinction more unambiguously with the help of various analogies. He was once asked in an assembly: "How should one understand the distinction between the *avatāras* and the *avatārin*?" Someone answered: "Like that of an actor and his character." Guṇātitanand Svāmī remarked: "No, that is not how the *avatārin* is distinct from his *avatāras*. Rather one should understand the distinction as like that between a king and his minister, an archer and his arrow, the moon, and the stars." (SV 6/33) The direction of Guṇātitanand Svāmī's examples seems to be of two ways; "firstly, that the two sets of analogies are different from each other, i.e., the archer, king, and moon are different from the arrow, minister, and the stars; and secondly that the former is more powerful than the latter. Significantly, he rejects the analogy of the actor and his character, which would imply that it is Parabrahman himself who personally transforms into the *avatāras* or takes on their role." As far as the supremacy of Parabrahman is concerned, we have to take into account that beyond being superior among all *māyic* objects and minor beings, would be in seeing how he stands in relation to other deities or *avatars*. The answer to this question lies in the relationship between Parabrahman and the *avatāras*? Svāminārāyaṇa explains this in Vac. Gadh. 2/9, a central discourse for understanding the supremacy of Parabrahman. Svāminārāyaṇa states precisely the belief that a devotee should have after stressing the need for an accurate understanding of Parabrahman's nature: "One should also strongly maintain the strength of conviction in Parabrahman's

²⁶² BGSB 7/7, 160

²⁶³ BGSB 8/22 194

form, i.e. ‘I have attained the very form of Parabrahman who reigns supreme, who forever possesses a divine form, and who is the *avatārin*, the cause of all the *avatāras*.’ (Vac. Gadh. 2/9, p. 403)

Convincingly, He recaps this point with strong emphasis a little later in the discourse, this time enhancing a stern note of alerting too. “One should realize the manifest Parabrahman that one has attained to forever possess a divine form and to be the *avatārin*, the cause of all the *avatāras*. If, however, one does not realize this and instead realizes Parabrahman to be formless or like the other *avatāras*, then that is regarded as committing blasphemy against Parabrahman.”²⁶⁴ Undoubtedly, this statement reflects that Parabrahman is not the same as the other *avatāras*. Rather, He is their cause. The term Svāminārāyaṇa uses for Parabrahman in this context is ‘*avatārin*’, meaning ‘lord or master of the *avatāras*’.

As we have expounded upon *īśvara* and the process of creation in the last topics on *īśvara* and *māyā*, respectively. Thereby, it becomes clear that *avatāras* are ontologically distinct from Parabrahman. In further discussion, Svāminārāyaṇa reveals in Vac. Gadh. 2/31 about Virāṭa Puruṣa (sometimes called Vairāja Puruṣa), the very self and executive administrator of each created *brahmānda*: “It is said in the scriptures that the *avatāras* emanate by way of that Virāṭa Puruṣa.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p.460) In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, it is evident and the essence of the scriptures that only when Parabrahman (referred to in that discourse as Vāsudeva Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva Bhagavān) ‘enters into Virāṭa Puruṣa can *avatāras* be possible. It is when Vāsudeva Nārāyaṇa resides in Virāṭa Puruṣa ... that there are said to be *avatāras*.’²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/9, p.403

²⁶⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p.459, Vac. Gadh. 2/10

On the other hand : “When that Vāsudeva Bhagavān withdraws himself and separates from Virāṭa Puruṣa, then it is not possible for an *avatāra* to originate through Virāṭa Puruṣa alone ... In fact, when Vāsudeva the over-soul had not yet entered him, that Virāṭa Puruṣa was not even capable of carrying out any of his own activities.”²⁶⁶ And yet, Svāminārāyaṇa adds, because of this special entering by Parabrahman: “Thus, all those *avatāras* are Vāsudeva Bhagavāna’s only.”²⁶⁷

To make more transparent this *avatar-avatārīn* relationship, the Bhāṣyakāra comments on the BG’s *Vibhūti yoga*: “लोकमहेश्वरं लोकानां जीवानामीश्वराणां मुक्तानां च महेश्वरं महाप्रशासकम्। अक्षरब्रह्मणोऽपि लोकपदवाच्यजीवेश्वरमुक्तानां शासकतयेश्वरत्वात्, परमात्मनस्ततोऽपि महत्त्वान्महेति विशेषणम्। अथवा लोकशब्दस्य निवासस्थानविशेषार्थत्वे सर्वेषां लोकानां पुराणेतिहासादिप्रसिद्धतत्तदेवताविभवादिधाम्नां महेश्वरमित्यर्थः। तत्तद्धामाधिष्ठातृणां तदीश्वरत्वेऽपि भगवतस्तेषामपीश्वरत्वेन सर्वलोकमहेश्वरः स एवेति महेति विशेषणम्। तथा च श्रूयते ‘तमीश्वराणां परमं महेश्वरं तं देवतानां परमं च दैवतम्। पतिं पतीनां परमं परस्ताद् विदाम देवं भुवनेशमीड्यम्’ (श्वे.६/७ (इति महेश्वरशब्देन परमात्मभिन्नचेतनविशेषमीश्वरतत्त्वं प्रसिद्धयति)” (BGSB 10/3, p.223) “Parabrahman is the Lord of all *jīvas*, *īśvaras* and all liberated *ātmans*. Even Akṣarabrahman, who is greater than *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, and controller of all *them* as well. Thus, Parabrahman is even greater to Akṣarabrahman. If the word ‘*loka*’ reflects the realm, then Parabrahman is the master of all abodes, which are famous in the *Puranas*, and He is the greatest of all devas and Akṣaradhāma as well. He is the ultimate controller of all the masters of the different realms. As the SU echos that Paranbrahman is the deity of all deities and master of all masters, lord of the entire universe. In this manner, the word *Maheśvara* clearly indicates a different entity (*avatāra*) which is not Parabrahman (*avatārīn*).”

Succinctly, we can say that Parabrahman is the master of all master, lord of all lords, and venerable for every being. After explaining the *Vibhūti*²⁶⁸ is different from one

²⁶⁶ Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p.461

²⁶⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p.461

²⁶⁸ BGSB 10/19, p.230

who says this is my *Vibhūti*, Bhadreśādāsa makes a clear distinction from *īśvara* Ram and Kṛṣṇa to Parabrahman. He states: “अनेन सर्वकारणत्वं परमात्मनः अवगम्यते” (BGSB 10/31, p.234) “Thus, Parabrahman’s supremacy is known.” “सर्वनियामकसर्वाकारणस्य परमात्मनः संकल्पविशेषेण स्वनियाम्य ईश्वरचेतनान्तरे वसुदेवतनयात्मन्यनुप्रवेशविशेषात्” (BGSB 10/37, p. 236) “Parabrahman, who is all controller and cause of all *avatars* reenters in the son of Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa, *īśvara*) through his resolve.” Within the discussions of Parabrahman as one and without the second, the supreme lord, the soul of the entire world, the cause of the *avatāras* and, as greater even than Akṣarabrahman have been primarily concerned with his supremacy in relation to others, which have been described by us.

5.3 *Kartā*: Parabrahman as Omni-agent

We shall first have to unpack what the *Svāminārāyaṇa* school of philosophy means by the term ‘all-doer’ and its other related terms. It will be detailed in the following points:

5.3.1 Parabrahman is the All-Doer and All-Cause

The Vedānta claims that Parabrahman is the all-doer; what does that actually mean? To answer this question first, we will understand what Parabrahman’s power is and what type of functions He does. The analysis of the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Prasthānatrayī Bhāṣya* reveals that the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta includes a number of aspects in the agency of Parabrahman. As ‘*kartā*’, Parabrahman creates, sustains, and dissolves, controls, supports, empowers, inspires, dispenses, and permits *karmic* fruits. *Svāminārāyaṇa* uncovers it in numerous discourses that Parabrahman is responsible for the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe. For instance: “Beyond that Akṣara is Akṣarātīta Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān, who is the all-doer – responsible for the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of everything.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/51, p.125) “That greatness of Parabrahman should be understood as follows: (Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān) is responsible for

creating, sustaining and dissolving countless millions of *brahmāndas*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/78, p.199)

However, “Parabrahman does not himself directly engage in the process of creation, sustenance, and dissolution. As we saw more in the topic on *māyā* and the evolution of the physical world (*jagata*), it is by Parabrahman’s mere will (*sankalpa*) that the entire creative Process (*utpatti-sarga*) is originated. Unquestionably, it is also completely true to say that without Parabrahman’s will, there would be no creation, substance or dissolution, and thus, it is precise to depict Parabrahman as, eventually, the creator, sustainer, and dissolver.”²⁶⁹ In addition to this, *māyā* is the actual material from which the physical universe is composed, and it is also one of the five eternal entities of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* metaphysical system. Significantly, it is noteworthy to observe that when discussing Parabrahman’s doer-ship, *Svāminārāyaṇa* also stresses Parabrahman as being the ‘*kāraṇa*’ - i.e., the cause of all things, including creation - often together with him being the ‘*kartā*’. For example: “What is that Parabrahman like? Well, he is indeed the cause of all causes (*sarva kāraṇā paṇ kāraṇa*).” (Vac. Gadh. 3/31, p.647)²⁷⁰ “Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is the all-doer, the all-cause, the all-controller.” (Vac. Loyā.13, p.327)²⁷¹

The Bhāṣyakāra reveals this truth from the *Prasthānatrayī*: “ममात्मा संकल्पमात्रेण भूतभावनः सर्वाणि भूतानि भावयति स्थापयति धारयति नियमयति चेति ममैश्वरं योगं पश्येति पूर्वोक्तान्वयः।” (BGSB 9/5, p.205) “By only my will, everything is created, sustained and dissolved, supported, controlled, inspired, empowered, permitted, and dispensed karmic fruits. Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna: Thus, see this my magical power.” The TUSB explains: “एवं प्रपञ्चोत्पत्तिहेतुत्वं तत्स्थितिहेतुत्वं तत्प्रलयहेतुत्वं चेति त्रयं समुदितं प्रत्येकं वा भवति ब्रह्मणो लक्षणम्” (TUSB 3/1/1, p.396). “Here, Bhāṣyakāra

²⁶⁹ SU 1/1-3

²⁷⁰ See also Vac. Loyā.2

²⁷¹ See also Vac. Gadh. 1/51

uses the word Brahman for Parabrahman. (तद् ब्रह्म परब्रह्म) thus, Parabrahman is the cause of the creation, sustainment, and dissolution of this universe. Sometimes in the Vedic scriptures, these three attributes are mentioned together and sometimes one of them reflects as an attribute of Parabrahman as per the contexts.” In the *Īkṣaternādhikaraṇam* of BSSB, the Bhāṣyakāra comments on the *Sadvidyā* which is the subject sentence of the discussion: “ब्रह्मपरब्रह्मेत्युभयस्य सच्छब्दवाच्यस्य सकलप्रपञ्चत्पत्तिस्थितिप्रलयाधारत्वं निरूपयाञ्चकार” (BSSB 1/1/12, p. 36) “The *Śruti* narrates that Brahman and Parabrahman are the cause of the creation, sustainment, and dissolution of the universe.”

5.3.2 Efficient Cause and Material Cause

In the Indian philosophical system, the cause and effect factor is discussed at length. There are two types of causes for every creative outcome: the efficient cause (*nimitta kāraṇa*), which refers to the agent who affects to the creation, and the material cause (*upādānakāraṇa*), which refers to the very material from which the object is created. Let us explore this, in the creating of an earthen pot, the potter is the efficient cause while the clay is its material cause. Of these two types of causes, maker, and material, which cause is Parabrahman? As per the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta? The answer is both; Parabrahman is the *Abhinna-nimittopādānakāraṇa*, the combined (non-distinct) efficient and material cause. For example, Parabrahman as the efficient cause of the universe, “That Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagwān is the all-doer - responsible for the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of everything - and is also the cause of all.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/5I, p.125) at the same time, He is the material cause.

Svāminārāyaṇa further adds: “A cause always pervades its effect, and simultaneously, also remained distinct from it. Thus, if one looks from the perspective of Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān the cause of all – then nothing else appears to exist except Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān.” The causality

referred to here by Svāminārāyaṇa is of both types, thus bringing together descriptions of Parabrahman as both the efficient and material cause the Bhāṣyakāra comments: “इत्थमेतदुपनिषदुपक्रान्तसच्छब्दाच्चस्य ‘तदैक्षत बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति’ (छा. ६/२/३) इति दिव्याक्ष्याकरणकलेवरात्मकसाकृतिकतयैव जगदभिन्ननिमित्तोपादानताया...श्रुतत्वाच्च” (BSSB 1/1/12, p.34) “Thus, *Upaniṣad* narrates the Parabrahman as ‘sat’, who himself wished that, ‘may I be many, may I grow forth.’ That indicates Parabrahman, who possesses all divine *indriyas* and is with definite form, as the material and efficient cause of the universe.”

The UB also confirms: “एकस्यैव तस्य (परमात्मनः) जगत् प्रति निमित्तोपादानोभयविधकारणत्वात्” (AUSB 1/1/1, p.417) “Only Parabrahman is the efficient and material cause of the universe.” When we say this, then there may be some doubts and questions about how this is possible for Parabrahman and, even if it is, how it may affect his precise nature.²⁷² Parabrahman is a sentient entity and an intelligent creator of the universe, the efficient cause, seems reasonable enough. But how can Parabrahman be the material cause of the universe? As we know that *māyā* is the primitive matter from which the universe is made. So does Parabrahman as said in the *Upaniṣad* and Vac. “take the form of *māyā* and literally become the physical world’ with its innumerable objects of innumerable names and forms? Indeed, for we have already discovered Parabrahman has a distinct, definite, and transcendental form in his abode, which he never abandons. So then does that Parabrahman somewhat become the visible world, still remaining in part in his transcendental form? But that would make him incomplete, divisible, effectively mutable, whereas the *śāstras*, including the *Vacanāmṛta*, proclaim Parabrahman to be whole, without parts (*niramśa*), indivisible (*akhaṇḍa*) and immutable (*avikārin*).²⁷³

²⁷² BSSB. 2/1/27-28, pp.177-178

²⁷³ SU 6/11; Vac. Pan.2

These objections are presented in the commentary of BS 2/1/7. The objectors' challenge can be recapped thus: If you insist on Parabrahman being the material cause of the world, then you will have to accept him as either having parts or being without a distinct transcendental form. This noticeable philosophical tight spot is settled by Bhadreśadāsa by firstly taking recourse in *śāstrika* revelation.²⁷⁴ Convincingly, at the very beginning, when discussing sources and tools of *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy is described, revelation according to the teachings of the Guru is the only authoritative way by which to accurately determine the nature of Parabrahman.

Bhadreśadāsa thus explains that that which is beyond our senses and mind cannot have any other means of confirmation except scripture. The basic reasoning is: the *Śrutis* reveal Parabrahman as being the material cause as well as being whole, immutable, indivisible, etc., then there is no point to argue? We have to summon two key doctrines to substantiate this point and to help explain how Parabrahman can indeed be the joint cause of the universe. Firstly, since Parabrahman is the inner self of the universe, he permeates, empowers, and controls his entire body. However, this permeating is by his *antaryāmi-śakti*, or exceptional *yogic* powers, “allowing him to, hence, be immanently present within all while still being distinctly transcendental. For the task of creation, specifically, Parabrahman especially ‘re-enters’ *māyā* and the various elements, overpowering their own identity and reigning supreme within them. It is in this sense that Parabrahman is said to take the form of *māyā*.” *Svāminārāyaṇa* explains this in *Vac. Gadh.* 1/41. After establishing that ‘Puruṣottama Bhagavān creates and enters the various types of life-forms as their cause and as their indwelling controller (*antaryāmīn*), He adds, as if responding the above objection: “There is only one Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān, and it is He who enters all and resides in them as the indwelling

²⁷⁴ *Ananyatvādhikaraṇa* in BS 2/1/14, See BSSB 2/1/14-21, pp. 168–73/45 CUSB 6/2/1-3, pp. 252–8/40 and in BU 1/4/10 for Akṣarabrahman.

controller. But, He does not himself become the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* by assuming many forms.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/41, p.104)

The second doctrine involves the view of causality established by Svāminārāyaṇa, in Vac. Loyā. 2, Svāminārāyaṇa clears these points in this way: “Parabrahman, who is the cause of all, appears like a human being, yet by his powers, he is able to create countless millions of *brahmāndas* from his body (i.e., *māyā*) and is able to absorb them back into himself.” (Vac. Loyā. 2, p. 285)

The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* explains the famous *Sadvidyā* in the preaching of Uddalaka to his son Śvetaketu also refers to this idea. “Dear son, in the beginning, there was verily only this Being, one, without second” (CU 6/2/2) - refers to Parabrahman as being the material cause, the primordial Being from which all springs forth. The following verse at once says: “That (Being) thought (literally, ‘saw’), ‘Let me be many’, ‘Let me propagate” (CU 6/2/3), points to an intelligent being, establishing that primordial Being as also the efficient cause who wills, inspires and thereby initiates each new cycle of creation.²⁷⁵ The same twofold representation of Parabrahman is made in TU 2/6/3–2/7/1 and AU 1/1/1/40 Both passages contain similar words to the *Sadvidyā* instruction above, with the latter being especially useful because it uses the term ‘*ātmān*’ instead of *sat*, i.e., “In the beginning, there was only this one self (*ātmān*) ... He thought (‘saw’), ‘let me create the worlds’. He thus created the worlds.” (AU 1/1/1) After the opening aphorism instructs that an inquiry into Brahman should be conducted, The second *Brahmasūtra* meticulously debates the causality of the world. *Janmādyasya yataḥ* (BS 1/1/2), “That Brahman is that from which (occurs) the origination, etc. of this (world).”

²⁷⁵ CUSB 6/2/3

As Bhadreśadāsa explains: In this debate, when the objectors argue that Brahman could plausibly refer to such beings as a *Brahmin*, or Brahma the *īśvara*, or a *jīva* or liberated soul, or even the Vedas, Bhadreśadāsa is quick to emphasize that it is impossible for any of them to be both the efficient and material cause of the world, because only Parabrahman can go into, control and empower the whole world as its self. Thus, only Parabrahman can be the complete cause of everything, not anyone or anything else.

Though, considering Parabrahman to be both the efficient cause and material cause of the universe advances a serious and potentially stubborn dispute against the perfect nature of Parabrahman. Even the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta can not disbelieve that a causal substance (the material cause) is not dissimilar from its effect, just as a pot is similar to the clay from which it was produced and a piece of cloth from its threads. This raises some questions like; since the world is composed of things that are inert, mutable, in flux, sorrow-filled, ordinary, sullied by the impurities of *māyā* and always constituted of the three *māyic* qualities (*sattva*guṇa, *rajo*guṇa, and *tamo*guṇa), how can it be that Parabrahman is its material cause? The objectors are efficiently saying: if you claim on Parabrahman being the material cause of the universe, you will have to admit that He is no longer conscious, immutable, unchanging, divine, and replete with bliss, pure and forever transcending *māyā*. In reply, the *Brahmasūtras* assert: “But it can be seen.” (BS 2/1/6)

The answer, as Bhadreśadāsa enunciates, “there are examples - both around us and mentioned in texts - that disconfirm the position that the effect is necessarily the same nature as its cause. For instance, hairs grow from a person, and in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, ‘from space came air; from the air, fire’, etc.” (TU 2/1/1) Space is without any of the tactile qualities found in air, nor does air have the form or appearance of fire? Therefore, there is unwarranted in Parabrahman being the

material cause and still being different in nature from the universe and unblemished by all its inadequacies. This is feasible by virtue of him being the indweller, controller, support, and self of everything, including of *māyā* from which the universe is composed. In Vac. Var. 7 Svāminārāyaṇa asserts this by further elucidating upon the concept of Parabrahman as *anvaya* and *vyatireka* - that Parabrahman can be immanent within and non-different from *māyā* as its self and yet be completely distinct from it in his Akṣaradhāma.

He explains: “The principle of *anvaya-vyatireka* is not that Parabrahman has become half immanent within *māyā* and remains half distinct in his abode. Rather, Parabrahman’s form is such that he is immanent within *māyā* and yet, at the same time, he is distinct. Parabrahman is not afraid, ‘What if I enter *māyā* and thereby become impure?’ Instead, when Parabrahman associates with *māyā*, even *māyā* becomes like Akṣaradhāma (his abode); and if he associates with the 24 (*māyic*) elements (of creation), then they also become *Brahmarūpa* (i.e. like Brahman).” (Vac. Var. 7, pp.546-547) Therefore, there is no question of Parabrahman becoming flawed. He can safely be the material cause of the world as well as its efficient cause without imperiling his decency.

5.3.3 All-doer Still Non-doer

The most fundamental principle of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta is that “Only Parabrahman is the all-doer.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/21, p.440) Parabrahman is totally ‘unaffected’ or ‘unspoiled’ (*nirlepa*) by these actions. His perfect nature is in no way tainted. This being Parabrahman can justifiably be regarded as the pure all-doer of all that is. More specifically, in Vac. Gadh. 1/62, Svāminārāyaṇa affirms that a person with the perfect conviction of the nature of Parabrahman comprehends: “Parabrahman is not like time, not like *karma*, not like nature, not like *māyā*, and not like Puruṣa. He realizes Parabrahman to be distinct from

everything, as the controller of them all and the cause of them all.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/62, p.145)

Bhadreśadāsa also highlights: “मां परमात्मानं कर्माणि तदनुष्ठितानि शुभाशुभात्मकानि सर्वविधानि कर्माणि न लिम्पन्ति बन्धनं विधातुं न प्रभवन्ति यतो हि नाहं कर्मवश्योपि तु कर्माणि मे वशवर्तीनि” (BGSB 4/14, p.99) “Every type of good and bad *karmas* do not bind Me. I am not controlled by them; instead, I control them.”²⁷⁶ Moreover, the crucial discussion takes place in the *Vilakṣaṇādhikaraṇa* of BS, in which an objection is made that if Parabrahman is a material cause and He resides in everything as their *antaryāmī* then how can he possibly prevent himself being untouched? Bhadreśadāsa answers: “तथा च यथा लौकिकोपादानोपादेयेषु अपि मुकुटकुण्डलादयो लयं गच्छन्तः स्वोपादानं सुवर्णं स्वधर्मैर्न दुषयन्ति तदास्य दिव्यालौकिकस्य ब्रह्मणः परब्रह्मणो वा सर्वथालिप्तस्य जगदुपानस्य तदुपदेयधर्मलेप गन्धोपि कथमाशङ्कयेता” (BSSB 2/1/9, p.163) “Even as materials like ornaments are not able to affect their cause the gold, then how possibly the effect in the form of *māyic* creations can influence their ultimate cause Brahman and Parabrahman which are eternally detached from their effect.” All these scriptural statements echo Parabrahman as the controller and omni-doer, supporter, sovereign lord, and sole independent doer of everything. He is indeed the independent doer of everything.²⁷⁷

5.4 *Sākāra*: Parabrahman as Having Form

Since his childhood, Svāminārāyaṇa had been very fond of this *sākāra* principle. Almost all his documented descriptions repeatedly and decidedly reveal the actual form of Parabrahman. He enforces that Parabrahman is *sākāra* (with form), that He has an eternally divine human form. Each of these four terms is important for Him: Parabrahman has a form, but while it is human in shape, that form is not constituted of any *māyic* material; it is divine and deprived of any of the impurities,

²⁷⁶ BG 4/9, 4/13,

²⁷⁷ BSSB 1/1/2, pp. 12–17, BSSB 2/1/6, pp. 161–162.

imperfections, and limitations of *māyā*. This is a fundamental principle. It is true at any time and tense. When He is forever present in his transcendental abode or pervaded throughout the world, and even when he chooses to manifest on earth. Now we are highlighting numerous aspects of Parabrahman's form and how potential charges against this belief have been addressed.

5.4.1 Eternal Form

In the various *Vedantic* system, Parabrahman is accepted as *sākāra*, but only when he comes to the earth, otherwise he is not *sākāra*, but Svāminārāyaṇa does not accept this principle; instead, he explains in over twenty discourses that Parabrahman is '*sākāra*' forever. For example: "Parabrahman, who is Puruṣottama, forever presides with a divine form in his Akṣaradhāma." (Vac. Gadh. 1/71, p.172)²⁷⁸ "Therefore, Parabrahman indeed forever possesses a form... and is forever present in his Akṣaradhāma." (Vac. Gadh. 3/35, p.658) Here, significantly, Svāminārāyaṇa states that Parabrahman is *sākāra* in Akṣaradhāma, as well, which is the divine abode of Parabrahman wherein he infinitely resides and entails the term *sadā* (forever and eternally).

Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies: "Even at the time of *Ātyaṃtika-pralaya* (final dissolution, i.e., before the beginning of a new cycle of creation), Parabrahman and His (liberated) devotees remain in Akṣaradhāma with a definite and divine form enjoying divine bliss." (Vac. Pan.7, p.380). The ancient scriptures of India also assert the definite form of Parabrahman. The CU states: "तस्य यथा कप्यासं पुण्डरीकमेवमक्षिणी तस्योदिति नाम" (CU 1/6/7) "Whose eyes are like a blue lotus, his name is *ut*, for he has risen (*udita*) above all evil." The Bhāṣyakāra comments on this *mantra*: "शोभातिशययुतपुण्डरीकनयनः परमात्मेत्यर्थः । एवमत्र, अन्तरादित्ये हिरण्यमयो हिरण्यश्मश्रुर्हिरण्यकेशः आप्रणखात् सर्व एव सुवर्णः तस्य कप्यासं पुण्डरीकमेवमक्षिणी इत्यादिपदैः परमात्मनः सदा साकृतित्वं प्रतिपादितम्" (CUSB 1/6/7, p.39)

²⁷⁸ Vac. Var.12, Vac. Gadh. 3/32

“Parabrahman’s eyes are like beautiful blue lotus’. That golden, luminous and handsome person, who is seen pervading the sun, with the golden (luminous) beard and golden (luminous) hair, he is glowing altogether to the very tips of his nails. In this way, Parabrahman’s definite form is asserted.”

The BS also elucidates that Parabrahman is not only *sākāra* after the creation but he is also *sākāra* before the creation of the cosmos. In the *Īkṣatērnādhikaraṇam* of the BS, an assiduous topic was discussed. In that treatise, on the basis of the ‘*sat kāraṇavāda*’ (CU) the question was raised that who is the final cause of the world? The opponent, mainly the *Sāṃkhya* School, argues that it is *pradhāna* or *prakṛti* who is the cause of the world. But the *siddhānti* responds that the *Śruti* ‘*tadaikṣata*’ confirms that the cause must have eyes etc. Thus *prakṛti* cannot be the cause because it is inert. Then the Bhāṣyakāra concludes: “जगत्कारणस्य दिव्यनेत्रादिकरणकलेवरात्मकं साकृतित्वं प्रस्थापयति” (BSSB 1/1/5, p.31). “Therefore, the *Śruti* here, in the form of subject matter, confirms that Parabrahman the cause of the universe has a definite form with divine eyes and other limbs.”

5.4.2 Parabrahman in Human-Like Form

Convincingly, it is not enough to know that Parabrahman has a definite and divine form.²⁷⁹ It is necessary to know what that eternal form is like, for even objects such as pots and pans and creatures such as cows and horses have ‘a form’. So, what does Parabrahman look like? This enticingly simple yet bold question is at the heart of many spiritual discussions and disputes. Svāminārāyaṇa is unambiguous in his description: Parabrahman is in human-like shape (*manuṣyākāra* form). Svāminārāyaṇa points out a fully normal human form by mentioning that Parabrahman possesses two-arms (*dvibhuja*). He declares in Vac. Gadh. 3/38: “The form of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma and the form of the *muktas*- the attendants

²⁷⁹ Vac. Pan.7

of Parabrahman - are all real, divine, and extremely luminous. Also, the form of that Parabrahman and those *muktas* is two-armed like that of a human.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/38, p.664)²⁸⁰

He collects more detail about that form that before the bliss of the form of that Parabrahman, the sensorial pleasures of this realm and the higher realms pale into insignificance. Such is the form of Parabrahman and that form always has two arms.²⁸¹ As if in answer to our very own question above, Svāminārāyaṇa points out anticipating a follow-up question about other extraordinary forms of Parabrahman, he quickly clarifies that but by Parabrahman’s own wish, He may appear to have four arms, or sometimes to have eight arms, or He may even be seen as having a thousand arms.²⁸² Moreover, in Vac. Gadh. 2/13, Svāminārāyaṇa discloses the most vivid sketch of all the aspects regarding the human form of Parabrahman. “The form is dark, but due to the intensity of the light, it appears to be rather fair, not dark. The form has two arms and two legs, not four, eight or a thousand arms, and its appearance is very captivating. The form is extremely serene. It appears like a human in shape and is youthful. Sometimes that form in the divine light is seen standing, sometimes sitting, at other times, it is seen walking around.” (Vac.Ga. 2/13, pp. 418-419)

In this way, this human-shaped form is eternal; Parabrahman looks like a human when he manifests on earth, just as he does in Akṣaradhāma, even at the time of final dissolution.²⁸³ The ancient Indian texts also describe the extremely luminous

²⁸⁰ Vac. Var.2

²⁸¹ Vac. Loyā 18

²⁸² Vac. Loyā.18, In addition, Svāminārāyaṇa mentions in several other sermons the "holy feet" {*caranāvinda*}, or simply '*carana*' of God (Vac. Gadh. 1/71, Gadh. 1/74, Loyā.13, Loyā.17, Gadh. 3/4, Gadh. 3/7, Gadh. 3/9, Gadh. 3/11, Gadh. 3/13), often as being worshipped in Akṣaradhāma by countless millions of liberated souls' (Vac. Gadh. 3/31; also Vac. Gadh. 2/25, Gadh. 3/39). Svāminārāyaṇa also cites descriptions from the *Upaniṣads* that describe Parabrahman as 'seeing', and thereby argues that God has eyes and indeed all sense organs (Vac. Gadh. 1/45, Pan.7). Together, these statements create a strong, clear image of Parabrahman as having a fully formed human shape, with two arms, feet, eyes and other sense organs, etc.

²⁸³ Vac. Gadh. 1/37

form of Parabrahman present within the extremely luminous divine light of his abode.²⁸⁴ In the BSSB, the Bhāṣyakāra carries a longer aforementioned discussion²⁸⁵ of the subject matter of CU *mantra* 1/6/7 and concludes with the exact translation of Vac. Gadh. 2/13 and 1/37: “इत्थमिह परमात्मैव साकृतिकत्वेन निरूपितः। साकृतिकोऽपि न येन केनचिदप्याकारेणाऽपि तु दिव्यकरचरणादिकरणयुतपुरुषाकार एवेति ‘पुरुषः’ इत्यनेन सिद्धान्तितम्। स च पुनर्द्विभुजचरण एव। चतुर्भुजादित्वं तु द्विभुजचरणस्य सत एव तस्य निमित्तविशेषनिबन्धनं स्वैश्वर्ययोगजनितं न सर्वकालिकम्। स च सदा किशोरमूर्तिर्धनश्यामोऽपि दिव्यतेजोऽतिशयाद्भिरण्मयत्वेन वर्णितः। स चेदृग्विधोऽयं स्वदिव्याऽक्षरधाग्नि दिव्यसिंहासनरूढः सन्नेव तद्रूपमजहदेव स्वसङ्कल्पमात्रतः कृपया मानुषादिरूपेणाऽऽविर्भवतीतीहामुष्यसर्वत्रसाकृतिकः। प्रलयाऽवस्थायामपि कालाऽस्पृष्टोऽयं नैककोट्यक्षरमुक्तैरीक्ष्यमाणो विराजत इति दर्शनेन दृश्याकारसिद्धिः।”²⁸⁶ (BSSB 1/1/21, p. 46)

“In this way, Parabrahman is defined as having a definite form. This form or shape is not other shaped like but that form always has two arms. The form is dark, but due to the intensity of the light, it appears to be rather fair, not dark. The form has two arms and two legs, not four, eight or a thousand arms, and its appearance is very captivating. The form is extremely serene. It appears like a human in shape and is youthful. Even at the time of the final dissolution, unaffected from the *kaal*, He remains surrounded by the countless liberated souls, who are indulged in the constant darshan of Parabrahman in divine Akṣaradhāma, from where Parabrahman takes birth on the earth by His own wish.”

The CUSB also confirms that human-shaped Parabrahman: “तदपि दिव्यद्विकरद्विचरणादियुतपुरुषाकारमेवेति पुरुष इत्यनेनोक्तमतो न निराकारः स कदापि कुत्रापि ज्ञेयम्” (CUSB 1/6/7, p.39) “That form of Parabrahman has two hands, two legs, and a perfect divine human form. In this manner, he would never be considered as formless either in this

²⁸⁴ AU 1/1, BU 1/2/5, CU 6/2/3, BSSB1/1/5

²⁸⁵ *Antasdharmādhikaraṇa*; see BS-SB 1/1/21, pp. 45-6. See also MuU-SB 3/1/3, pp. 283-284 and SB 2/3/6, pp. 116-119 where *Purusa* denotes Parabrahman, and also IU-SB 16, p. 24 for elaboration of ‘*rūpam*’.

²⁸⁶ उक्तं च सृष्टिप्रकरणे ‘आत्मैवदमग्र आसीत् पुरुषविधः’ (बृ. १/४/१) इत्यादि। इत्थं साकृतिकत्विनश्च ये निराकारत्वोक्तयोऽस्य स्वेतरसमस्तवैलक्षण्यप्रतिपादनतात्पर्यकत्वेन प्राकृताऽऽकारनिषेधमात्रं ब्रुवन्तीति विज्ञेयम्। यच्चोक्तं ‘तस्य यथा कथ्यासम्’ (छा. १/६/७) इति जघन्योपमानश्रुतिरिति तदस्य वक्तुमेव जघन्यधीत्वमिति किं खण्डनेन। एतन्मन्त्रार्थश्च तद्वाच्यादवगन्तव्यः। तथा चाऽत्र ‘आदित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्ताद’ (तै. ना. १/८), ‘यदा पश्यः पश्यते रुक्मवर्णम्’ (मु. ३/१/३) इत्याद्यास्तत्साकृतिकत्वपराः श्रुतयो योज्याः। एवं ‘एषोऽन्तरादित्ये हिरण्मयः पुरुषः’ (छा. १/६/६) इति परमात्मैवेति सिद्धम्॥ १/१/२१॥

world or in his abode.” As far as the shape or form of Parabrahman is concerned, we have to discuss two more aspects which are very important to understand the nature of Parabrahman. They are *saguṇa* and *nīrguṇa* forms. Svāminārāyaṇa describes this in Vac. Kār. 8 as Parabrahman’s ‘original form’ (*mūla svarūp*) and these two forms. In this discourse, he first expounds Parabrahman’s *nīrguṇa* form as being ‘subtler than that which is subtle’, because he indwells and ensouls all of the material elements and spiritual beings, including Akṣarabrahman. He then portrays Parabrahman’s *saguṇa* aspect as being tremendously vast. He states: “Before the vastness of Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān, countless millions of *brahmāndas*, which are encircled by the eight barriers (i.e., earth, water, etc.), appear extremely minute, like mere atoms. Those *brahmāndas* do not become smaller, but before the vastness of Parabrahman, they appear small. In this way, the extreme vastness of the form of Parabrahman is the *saguṇa* aspect of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Kār. 8, p.267)

Here, we can anticipate a natural question that, then, in his *nīrguṇa* form, Parabrahman is subtler than the extremely subtle, and in His *saguṇa* form, He is vaster than the extremely vast. What, then, is the original form of Parabrahman - who assumes both of these forms – like? Svāminārāyaṇa resumes: “The answer to that is that the manifest form of Parabrahman visible in a human form is the eternal and original form of Parabrahman. His *nīrguṇa* and *saguṇa* aspects are the special, divine powers of that form.” The *Upaniṣads* also explain Parabrahman as: “Smaller than the smallest, larger than the largest.” (SU 3/20, KU 2/20), The Bhāṣyakāra asserts this fact:

सगुणं निर्गुणं चेति परं ब्रह्म निरूपितम् ।

सगुणं तु गुणौघत्वान्महत्त्वात् सर्वतस्तथा ॥ SSSK 209 ॥

निर्गुणमपि तज्ज्ञेयं शून्यत्वान्मायिकैर्गुणैः।

सूक्ष्माऽतिसूक्ष्मतायाश्च यज्ज्ञानाम्मुच्यतेऽशुभात् ॥ SSSK 210 ॥

“In His *nīrguṇa* form, Parabrahman is subtler than the extremely subtle, and in his *saguṇa* form, He is vaster than the extremely vast. In another meaning, when Parabrahman is called *saguṇa* means He is with all divine qualities. On the other hand, He is called *nīrguṇa* that reflects that He is beyond all the *māyic* qualities.”

5.4.3 Parabrahman Possesses a Human Form yet Divine

When we assert that Parabrahman possesses a human form but here the doubt may arise that do all the imperfections and inadequacies of human form affect Him? As should be apparent from the statements cited above, a term that repeatedly features when the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta talks about the eternally human-shaped form of Parabrahman is divine (*divya*). This is to dispel the doubt that Parabrahman has a human form, then it will necessarily be flawed, sullied, and limited by all the limitations, impurities, and imperfections of humans. The *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, in its descriptions effectively saying by adding divine that Parabrahman’s form is certainly human in shape but it is by no means human in nature (anthropophilic) or substance (anthrosubstantic). Subsequently, while ordinarily human bodies are composed of *māyā*, Parabrahman’s form is not affected by all the *māyic* imperfections, impurities, and limitations of human.²⁸⁷

Svāminārāyaṇa makes it a point to emphasize that Parabrahman’s form is totally unlike any other form. He explains this at considerable length, “the Vedas, the *Purāṇas*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Smṛtis*, and other scriptures proclaim that the original form of Parabrahman, which is eternal, without beginning and divine, resides in his Akṣaradhāma.” Again he asserts, “His form is not like any form that can be seen by the eyes. His sound is not like any sound that can be heard by the ears. His touch is not like any touch that can be felt by the skin. His smell is not like any smell that can be smelt by the nose. Nor is Parabrahman like anything that can

²⁸⁷ Vac. Gadh. 3/37, Vac. Gadh. 1/66

be described by the tongue.” In this manner then Svāminārāyaṇa concludes, “the form of that Parabrahman is such that it cannot be compared to the form of anyone in this *brahmānda*. Why? Because all of the forms in this *brahmānda* that have evolved from Prakṛti-Puruṣa are *māyic*, whereas Parabrahman is divine, not *māyic*. So, since the two are totally different, how can they possibly be compared.”²⁸⁸

Subsequently, we can submit that Parabrahman’s body is not formed, as human or even *devic* bodies are, as a consequence of *karmas* accumulated over numerous lives by way of their association with *māyā* and ignorance. Parabrahman, rather, is absolutely and eternally unaffected by *māyā*, controlling it and transcending it instead. His form is thus never even slightly sullied by *māyā*. Svāminārāyaṇa states: “In no way does even a hint of *māyā* taint the form of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/4, p.393)²⁸⁹ Before we start our analysis on this topic, how does Parabrahman remain unaffected even having a human-shaped form? First, we provide the background of the discussion: the objection is about when Parabrahman is the cause of all *māyic* worldly creation then when He assumes a human form or he becomes the material cause then Parabrahman must be *māyic* in nature.

The Bhāṣyakāra answers: “तत्र लौकिक लिङ्गदोषावकाशो न प्रभवति” (BSSB 2/1/28, p.179) “Not a trace of fault affect Parabrahman.” Again, the debate proceeds ahead. He claims: Parabrahman is “साकृतित्वेपि दिव्यकरचरणादिमत्त्वलक्षणसाकृतित्वेन तत्रापि मानुषाकृतित्वेनैवेति संकलितोर्थः” (BSSB 2/1/31, p.181). “Not only with any other form but a divine-human form.” This argument is used to refute one of the objections in BS 2/1/32, which draws from CU 6/2/1 and the same verse we saw earlier when discussing Parabrahman as the combined efficient and material cause.

²⁸⁸ Vac. Panch. 4

²⁸⁹ Vac. Loyā. 13, Vac. Kār. 7, Vac. Pan. 7

Uddālaka explains to his son Śvetaketu: “Oh dear son, in the beginning, there was verily only this being (*sat*).” Citing this, the objectors ask how “it can be possible for Parabrahman to have eyes, ears, hands, feet, life-breath, mind, etc., when there was absolutely nothing apart from being to make them from.” Bhadreśadāsa effectively retorts: “Indeed! They are not made from anything but are being itself. After analyzing this principle, we come to the point that how Parabrahman’s eyes, ears, and other ‘sense organs’ (as we would call them) are not like the organs of a human. Parabrahman does not need any senses or organs or mental faculty to know. He knows everything directly and independently.” This is because He is infinitely full of knowledge, and His mind, senses, and organs are all divine, celestial, and unlimited.²⁹⁰ Resuming further, “this non-material composition of Parabrahman also supports and expounds why He is not ascribed to a particular gender. As we saw in more detail in the chapter on *jīva*, Svāminārāyaṇa describes even the finite self as ‘neither male nor female’. ‘It is’, like Parabrahman, ‘characterized by pure existence and consciousness’.”²⁹¹ We find another clue about the non-genderedness of Parabrahman’s form from the new, divine body that the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* receive during the state of post-mortem liberation when dwelling in the transcendental abode with Parabrahman. This transcendental body is like Parabrahman’s two-armed human-shaped form²⁹² but adds elsewhere that it is: “Different from the two genders of the world. It is neither female in shape nor male in shape. It has a wholly *Brāhmika* body, which is neither feminine nor masculine.” (SV 7/2) Nevertheless, to explain and understand the form of Parabrahman, we are applying some sort of name or identity to Parabrahman; the limitations of human language and imagination force us to use nouns, pronouns, and imagery inevitably have gender connotations.

²⁹⁰ KeUSB 1/6, p.40

²⁹¹ Vac. Gadh. 3/22

²⁹² Vac. Gadh. 3/38; Loyā.18

Parabrahman remains as one form at all times during the creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the universe but does not undergo any changes as *māyic* objects do. He always maintains a divine form.²⁹³ This is because time devours everything except Parabrahman; that is to say, time's powers are incapable of affecting Parabrahman's form.²⁹⁴ When we say that Parabrahman is unaffected by and any company or surroundings He has, then, is He like space? There should be an inquiry that how Parabrahman could have any form, let alone one that is human in shape, and not be limited to being within a specific ten-dimensional boundary. But as we learn earlier, Svāminārāyaṇa persists that Parabrahman is already unbound by space; there is no place where one can say Parabrahman is not. He is all-pervading, even while having a definite form, because of divine, *yogic* powers. The fact being made to any proponents of any formless Parabrahman is this: Svāminārāyaṇa stated in Vac. Kār.8, "If you wish to call Parabrahman formless simply to avoid him limited by space, well, Parabrahman for us is already unbound by space. He is everywhere at all times. So, there is no question of avoiding any undesirable but inescapable limitations. Besides, it is not possible to 'measure' Him by any physical measurements simply because he transcends all physicality and eludes all measurements." Thus, Parabrahman is subtler than the extremely subtle, and ...vaster than the extremely vast.

The *Upaniṣad* similarly declares that Parabrahman is: "Smaller than a grain of rice, a barleycorn, a mustard seed, a grain of millet or a kernel of a grain of millet." And yet equally, He is "larger than the earth, larger than the intermediate region, larger than the sky, larger than these worlds." (CU 3/14/3) In this way, Parabrahman is "Smaller than the smallest, larger than the largest." (SU 3/20, KU 2/20) What the *Upaniṣads* and Svāminārāyaṇa are trying to say, in effect is that such physical measurements or boundaries do not apply to Parabrahman. He is beyond all

²⁹³ Vac. Gadh. 2/24

²⁹⁴ Vac. Gadh. 3/37

limitations of space, even as He remains in His original form.²⁹⁵ According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, then, Parabrahman has an eternal human form that is wholly unique, pure, and divine. After learning Parabrahman’s divine-human form in His transcendental abode, now we analyze Parabrahman’s manifest human form on earth.

5.5 *Pragaṭa*: Parabrahman as Manifest

Till this point, we have dealt with here three aspects of Parabrahman – Parabrahman as *sarvoparī*, *kartā*, and *sākāra*. Now we will investigate Parabrahman as *pragaṭa*. All the features of Parabrahman analyzed so far, Svāminārāyaṇa lays special emphasis on the significance of Parabrahman being manifest (*pragaṭa*) and realizing him as such. The English word incarnate or incarnation does not convey the correct sense, because it narrowly refers to the material body (or rebirth, or birth in a physical body). Therefore, the word ‘manifest’ or ‘manifestation of Parabrahman’ is perhaps found to convey the perfect understanding. Therefore, from Svāminārāyaṇa’s standpoint, it may be said that the two words ‘incarnation’ (*avatāra*) and ‘manifestation’ (*prākāṭya*) have different connotations. The former is used in a very lax and liberal sense as a generic term, while the latter is used in a restricted sense as a specific term implying ‘Parabrahman’s willing self-presentation’. Thus, the term ‘manifest’ is applied to ‘coming of or revealing of’ Parabrahman on earth while simultaneously being present in His highest abode. So, when Parabrahman descends on earth, He is not absent in His permanent residence Akṣaradhāma, but He assumes another equally beautiful-glorious-divine form. He rather manifests Himself in one more additional form to participate in the life of loving devotees.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ Vac. Kār. 8

²⁹⁶ Vac. Kar. 5

So, it is not descent from a higher plane to a lower plane with a physical body; rather, it is a spiritual descent into the celestial, human, or subhuman plane with all His transcendental glory and divinity intact accompanying Him. It is a descent out of love, mercy, and a desire to become accessible to all. Also, as Parabrahman manifests on earth, He possesses six unique opulence or supernatural attributes of transcendence, namely, perfect power, perfect beauty, perfect knowledge, perfect fame, perfect renunciation, and perfect wealth.²⁹⁷ Thus, when *sarvavatāri* Parabrahman (supreme godhead) Himself descends on the earth, He does so while simultaneously remaining present in His highest abode (Brahmadhāma/Akṣaradhāma)²⁹⁸, for He can assume as many forms as are necessary. He, out of His infinite ever-flowing grace for mankind, descends on earth, becomes one like us and unveils and reveals His transcendental glory and divinity.²⁹⁹ He, as such, is beyond the comprehension of finite beings, senses, mind, ego, and intellect. But, despite this, He wills to present Himself in the mortal coil and becomes accessible. This He can simultaneously do assuming as many forms in as many universes (worlds/earth).³⁰⁰

When He Himself descends on the earth assuming a human form, His physical body appears to be finite and imperfect and corporeal like human beings; but He is neither limited nor affected (influenced) by the properties of *māyā* (matter). Therefore, the visibly-manifest form of Parabrahman is as divine as the form of Parabrahman, in His highest abode Brahmadhāma. In other words, the visibly-manifest form of Parabrahman on the earth is totally identical with the eternally present divine form of Parabrahman in the highest abode.³⁰¹ Whenever the supreme Parabrahman Himself descends on the earth, He brings along with Him in His retinue Akṣarabrahman: the ideal supreme devotee and other released *ātmāns* as His

²⁹⁷ Vishnu Puran 6/5/79

²⁹⁸ Vac. Loya 18

²⁹⁹ Vac. Gadh 1/71

³⁰⁰ Vac. Gadh 1/78

³⁰¹ Vac. Gadh 1/24

attendants.³⁰² As in the *Gītā*, we find greater evidence. The BG introduces: यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत । अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥ BG 4/7 ॥ “Whenever there is a major decline of in the form of *Dharma* (*Svarūpaniṣṭhā* the firm conviction of Parabrahman) and the rise of *Adharma*, O Arjuna, then I incarnate myself.”

The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “स्वेच्छया अन्यजीवेश्वरात्मनोनुप्रविश्य कदाचित् साक्षादेव संभवामीति भावः” (BGSB 4/7, p.95) “Parabrahman by his independent will, sometimes He Himself manifests or sometimes he manifests through the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* by reentering them.” This statement leads us into the discussion where the question is why Parabrahman manifests? What is the purpose and purport of his manifestation? Bhadrēśadāsa provides solutions to this question and explicitly clears the way. He expounds that to grant liberation to infinitive *jīvas* and *īśvaras* is the primary purpose (BSSB 2/1/34, p.184) of Parabrahman. Along with this, he fulfills the wishes of His beloved devotees and establishes the *dharma* on earth (BGSB 4/8, p.96). Based on this evidence and the *sāmpradāyika* tradition as alive today, Dr. Raymond Williams writes: in the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya*, its founder, “Svāminārāyaṇa is thought to be the single, complete manifestation of the Supreme Person (Parabrahman-Puruṣottama), and such, is superior in power and efficacy to all other manifestations of God.”³⁰³

5.5.1 The Uniqueness of the Manifestation

The analysis we have conducted so far of an almighty, supreme, all-pervasive, all-knowing, creator Parabrahman, is a reflection of the great *Hindu* tradition. Perhaps what dramatically sets apart the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School standing of Parabrahman from other systems is its emphasis that that supremely transcendental Parabrahman can be, and in fact is, wholly present and personable among us, in human form, here and now. Certainly, that Parabrahman descends upon the earth in human (or any

³⁰² Vac. Gadh 1/71

³⁰³ Williams Raymond, Gods of Flesh/Gods of stone, (1985) p.145, USA

other freely chosen) form at a particular time is a concept that is familiar to *Hindū* tradition, especially of the *Vaiṣṇava* kind. There are, however, two primary differences in this corresponding doctrine in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition. Firstly, Parabrahman as *pragaṭa* is the descent of the *avatārin* himself, not an *avatāra*. Svāminārāyaṇa enunciates, for example: “One should realize the manifest Parabrahman that one has met to forever possess a divine form and to be the *avatārin*, the cause of all *avatāras*.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/9, p.403) In various *Vaiṣṇava* schools, these numerous *avatāras* have differing significance.³⁰⁴

Moreover, after first manifesting and carrying out his desired plan on earth, Parabrahman lasts to remain fully present even after returning to his abode upon completing a typical human lifespan. He does this by living on through Akṣarabrahman, whom, as we saw in the Akṣarabrahman section, He perpetually brings with him in human form and who takes the role of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. This sets in motion the Guru *Paramparā*, an unbroken succession of enlightened Gurus through whom Parabrahman carries on his liberation work. So even while the Guru is metaphysically Akṣarabrahman in entity and thus ontologically distinct from Parabrahman, he serves as the complete and perfect medium for Parabrahman’s love, bliss, blessings, and granting in final liberation.³⁰⁵ The elucidation of this topic also requires addressing some significant questions and challenges in order to comprehend it more fully. The manifestation of Parabrahman is forever on earth through Akṣarabrahman. In this manner, this topic is essential regarding ultimate liberation. Therefore, we will discuss it in the next chapter. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, to associate with the manifest form of Parabrahman and becoming *brahmarūpa* is the main spiritual endeavor of all spiritual endeavors on earth.

³⁰⁴VRS-2, pp.320-352

³⁰⁵BSSB 1/1/32, p.57

6. Conclusion

Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa revealed the existence of the five eternally distinct ontological entities; 1. *jīva* 2. *īśvara* 3. *māyā* 4. Akṣarabrahman (also Akṣara or Brahman) 5. Parabrahman (or Puruṣottama). Through the revelation of the above essential principle and the identification of these five distinct entities, Svāminārāyaṇa gifted the world with a novel Vedic *darśana*.³⁰⁶ Within the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya these five eternal entities are discussed in detail. The *Bhāṣyas* and *Svāminārāyaṇa Siddhānta Sudhā* contain the *śāstrīya* form of the documented teachings of Svāminārāyaṇa. We analyzed in this chapter that this teaching of *tattvapanchak* is elaborated upon in great detail by Bhadreśadāsa, the *Prasthānatrayī* Bhāṣyakāra. So, in light of *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya, this chapter explored to illuminate the phenomenon of the high substratum of the philosophical tenet; means the five eternal entities: 1. *jīva* 2. *īśvara* 3. *māyā* 4. Akṣarabrahman (also Akṣara or Brahman) 5. Parabrahman (or Puruṣottama), found in the *Prasthānatrayī*. As a result of this study of this chapter, the inflection point is marked that the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas follow the teachings of the *Vacanāmṛta*.

³⁰⁶Bhadreśadāsa Sādhu, *Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's Akshara-Purushottam-Darśana, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2018, p.3

CHAPTER – 4

ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF SPIRITUAL ENDEAVOUR

A full-scale philosophical system is necessary to engage with the problems in the following areas: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and theory of value, logic, and philosophical method.³⁰⁷ Nevertheless, above all, philosophy is an intellectual quest. It aims at the inquiry into the nature of ultimate reality. The philosophy of realism is an attempt to understand the relationship between man and the world and as well as with the ultimate reality. On the other hand, as Rādhākṛṣṇan says, “philosophy in India is essentially spiritual.”³⁰⁸ In this manner, philosophy is a quest for freedom and the highest well-being, based on faith in the ideal, which is realizable through the practice of certain disciplines. Thus, the belief in Parabrahman as the ultimate reality, faith in Parabrahman to redeem one’s self from bondage, trust in the efficiency of the means and disciplines undertaken to realize the highest goal of freedom and the inspiring examples of those who have attained freedom are the chief marks of Indian Vedic *Darśana*.

For Svāminārāyaṇa, philosophy and spirituality are two sides of the same coin. Mere intellectual apprehension without its efficacy and application in life is useless and unproductive. It is not worth the trouble if it does not help in reaching the goal it talks of. Therefore, philosophy must sub-serve the ultimate spiritual goal of attaining freedom; and this spirituality with a philosophical basis to satisfy intellectual quests and should become a positive rational movement. So, instead of being an academic activity of intellectual discussion concerning metaphysical reals, *Svāminārāyaṇa sādhanā* is also a profound spiritual activity directed towards the

³⁰⁷Potter Karl H., The Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophies, Metaphysics and Epistemology_ The Tradition of *Nyaya-Vaisesika* up to Gangesa, Motilal Banarasidas, 1977

³⁰⁸ Rādhākṛṣṇan S., Indian Philosophy-1, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990, p.24

realization of the goal of freedom, the fruit (*phala*) of all cognitive-affective-conative labor. Therefore, *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta begins with philosophical inquiry, which takes into account ontology, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and culminates in practical spirituality aiming at realization of the goal of freedom in one's life time. Consequently, it discusses in detail the means (spiritual endeavor) to attain the goal (*sādhana-vicāra*) and the nature and kind of *mokṣa* (*phalavicāra*).

1. Spiritual Endeavor (*Sādhana*)

We already discussed that the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School accepts the existence of five eternally ontological entities.³⁰⁹ Among this, the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are bound by *māyā*. By practicing spiritual endeavors and through the grace of Brahman and Parabrahman, *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are able to free themselves from *māyā* and attain utmost *mokṣa*. All the efforts that an aspirant does by thought, word and deed to achieve the final goal of his life is called *sādhana* or disciplined and dedicated spiritual endeavor. After mentioning the importance of *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, Bhadrēśadāsa elaborates:

कार्या तत्रैव भक्त्या प्रकटहरिसुधीर्दिव्यभावं निधाय ।

सेव्यो ब्रह्मस्थदेवो भवभयतरणे स्वामिनारायणोयम् ॥ SSSK-M p.306 ॥

“To overcome and become free from the fear of *māyic samsāra*, one should worship the manifest *Svāminārāyaṇa*, who resides within the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru with intense divinity.” The decisive aim of life is the ultimate liberation of one's *ātman* and attainment of Parabrahman. To accomplish this ultimate aim of life, an aspirant performs spiritual endeavors according to the precepts of the manifest form of Parabrahman.³¹⁰

The *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedanta aims to give an articulate system of philosophy combined with the tradition which satisfies aspirants to sustain their

³⁰⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/7, p.36; Vac. Gadh. 3/10, p.599

³¹⁰ Brahmaśāstra Sādhū, *Brahmavidyāno Rājamārga-2*, *Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahamadābāda, p.1

faith and attain the spiritual goal. This goal can be realized during one's life-time through the Guru-directed discipline enlivened and enlightened by *brahmavidyā*. *Brahmavidyā* encompasses dutifulness (*dharma*), (*vairāgya*), knowledge (*jñāna*) and devotion (*bhakti*), which is crowned by the grace of Parabrahman earned through the devotion in its truly cognitive spirit.³¹¹

Moreover, Svāminārāyaṇa's philosophy is realistic. In it, man, the world, and Parabrahman are all real. Man's stance on life and the world is real. The values, spiritual endeavor, bondage, and liberation are real. The rejection of these things would downgrade the whole spiritual efforts into a sort of mock-battle. The degrading of all these would lead to spiritual anarchy of virtues and values; and would cause apathy, inactivism, and a loss of inspiration and enthusiasm for self-ascent and freedom. Svāminārāyaṇa, therefore, holds that without assiduous spiritual endeavor (*sādhana*), the *jīvas* cannot attain the highest goal.³¹² *Svāminārāyaṇa* philosophy is centralized to Parabrahman, yet it emphasizes on spiritual endeavor. Therefore it includes '*puruṣārtha śāstra*' (pathway of endeavor to spiritual goal) in addition to being '*adhyātma-śāstra*' (the science of metaphysics) and '*pramāṇa-śāstra*' (the science of epistemology). It elaborately deliberates the *sādhana- mārga*, the pathway to Parabrahman realization. The spiritual regulation, therefore, includes knowledge of reality, the goal, and the means. The supreme goal to be realized is *mokṣa*, and thus, also called '*paramapada*'. This designation signifies the attainment of communion with the Parabrahman as well His supreme abode.³¹³

Parabrahman is both the goal and the means. He is the Summum Bonum. He is the first and final reality without whom no *devas* (*iśvaras*), no worlds, no selves, and

³¹¹ SSSK-366, 387

³¹² Vac. Sar. 11

³¹³ SV 1/301

no spiritual efforts can ever be considered. *Karma* can find its fruition because He maintains the law of causation. Impartiality and retribution are there because He reigns supreme as the moral governor. He perceives to it that fortune is determined according to deeds. By His will and power, the values are preserved. Therefore, Parabrahman, in His plenitude with infinite bliss, glory, and power, is the highest goal for all seekers.³¹⁴ Additionally, Akṣarabrahman, by Parabrahman's eternal will, is the unavoidable means to attaining Parabrahman for all seekers.³¹⁵ In this chapter, we will be exclusively analyzing the *Svāminārāyaṇa sādhanā* explored in the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* in light of the *Vacanāmṛta*.

2. Grace and Self-Effort

What role does self-effort play and what is the significance of Parabrahman's grace to attain the ultimate spiritual goal? Or do both have equal weightage? These are some of the most discussed questions in the Indian Vedānta tradition. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, both factors are necessary to attain liberation. Yet, each factor has a perfect proportion and essential role, which are elaborated in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Firstly, *Svāminārāyaṇa* chides those who rely on their endeavors to achieve liberation while discounting the absolute need and power of Parabrahman. Evoking the classical imagery of crossing the ocean of life and death, *Svāminārāyaṇa* explains: "A person without such a resolute conviction of Parabrahman's nature attempts to attain liberation using the strength of his own endeavors, but he does not strive for it by relying on the grace of Parabrahman. Such a senseless person is as stupid as someone wishing to cross the ocean by his own efforts without the aid of a ship. On the other hand, one who wishes for liberation through the grace of Parabrahman is wise, like one who wishes to cross the ocean by traveling in a ship." (Vac. Gadh. 1/37, p.94)

³¹⁴ Brahmaḍarśana Sādhū, *Vacanāmṛta Rahashya*- 2, *Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahamadābāda, 2004, pp.20-21

³¹⁴ SSSK-366, 387

³¹⁵ SSSK- 73

On the other hand, Svāminārāyaṇa highlights personal endeavor or self-effort as well: “Therefore, the personal endeavor itself is the greatest of all spiritual endeavors for attaining liberation.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/12, p. 416). Now we will elaborately analyze the roles that each factor plays in attaining liberation. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, with the inspiration of the Guru, when the aspirant’s spiritual endeavor (*sādhana*) reaches its acme of performance, it sketches a quicker answer from Parabrahman and His ensuing grace. He sprinkles His grace, draws a seeker closer to Him, uplifts him to the height of perfection and blesses him with the place in His divine abode. Parabrahman is the beginning and Parabrahman is the end of all endeavors. He is both an indispensable and sufficient means to realize the highest goal. Parabrahman’s grace motivates a seeker to tread the path of perfection, grants the necessary strength needed to perform spiritual endeavors, and provides inspiration in each stage. Bhadreśadāsa cites:

दयार्णवः कृपासाध्यः प्रसादात् सुलभा कृपा।

ब्रह्मभावात् प्रसीदेच्च ह्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमः॥SSSK 366॥

“Parabrahman is an ocean of compassion and attainable through His grace. His grace is easily attainable through his favor. Puruṣottama, who is accompanied with Akṣara, is pleased through *brahmabhāva*.” To remind the power of Parabrahman’s grace, the *Śruti* reveals:³¹⁶ “Paramātmān cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing (i.e., learning). He is attained only by the one whom the Paramātmān chooses. To such a one, the Paramātmān reveals his own form.” (MU 3/2/3, KU 2/23). When elaborating on the term ‘chooses’ (*vrnute*).

Bhadreśadāsa explains: “यं मुमुक्षुं वृणुते स्वानुग्रहेन स्वीकरोति, यस्मिन् प्रसन्नो भवति इति यावत्, तेनैव परमात्मानुगृहीतेन कृपापात्रेण भक्तेन एषः परमात्मा लभ्यः साक्षात्कर्तुं शक्यः।” (KUSB 2/23, pp.118-119) “Of the worshipper who is dedicated solely to Him (*svaikanistha upāsaka*). Only to such

³¹⁶ Here, *ātman* term is used for *Paramātmāna*

a vessel of Parabrahman's grace (*Parāmātmakspābhājana*) does he become realizable (*labhya*) and reveals himself." Here, he describes Parabrahman as 'an ocean of great compassion (*parāmadayāsāgara*) and a treasure of true love and grace (*kṛpānidhi*).'" Bhadreśadāsa adds at KU 2/23 that preachings, intellectual power, and scriptural learning represent all endeavors that can be performed in an attempt to reach Parabrahman. They alone are inadequate. Parabrahman, eventually remains '*kṛpā sādhyā*', attainable by grace alone.³¹⁷

Bhadreśadāsa is cautious, however, of not forcefully pitting human effort against divine grace. In adding the word '*kevala*' his comment above, he sheds light on that while all endeavors are adequate in realizing Parabrahman, they are insufficient alone. "They can still be effective in pleasing Parabrahman, who will then bequeath his liberating grace upon his beloved devotee. Convincingly, we can say that Parabrahman is pleased with the seeker's devout, sincere and persistent effort or striving. Parabrahman Himself remains infinitely beyond the reach of those actions. So, Parabrahman's grace is absolutely indispensable, useless either, even though they can only please Parabrahman and fulfill your endeavors through his grace."³¹⁸

So, "परमात्मा न स्वतःकल्पितसाधनसाध्योपि तु तत्कृपैकसाध्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्" (MUSB 3/2/3, p.293) "Parabrahman is not realized by self-imagined means but by only His grace. This is the principle." It is noteworthy that if there are any efforts that Bhadreśadāsa does dismiss as utterly pointless, they are the 'self-imagined means' (*Svataḥkalpitasāadhanā*) of a person who does not follow the authoritative instructions enjoined in revealed texts or by the Guru.

³¹⁷ KUSB 2/23, p.119

³¹⁸ KUSB 2/24, p.120

These qualifications are indispensable because in the subsequent verse of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*: “Paramātmān cannot be attained by one who is weak, nor by inadvertency, nor by austerities marked without authoritative endorsement.” It then concludes: “But the knower of *brahmavidyā* who strives by these means [i.e., learning, austerities, etc.] attains this Paramātmān and enters Brahmadhāma. (MU 3/2/4) In consequence, when these same efforts - including those mentioned in MU 3/2/3 and all others are informed by correct philosophical knowledge, practiced according to the calling and guidance of the Guru and directed solely to pleasing Parabrahman, they can indeed play some useful part in fortifying liberation by Parabrahman’s grace.” (MU 3/2/3)

In this fashion, Parabrahman showers his grace upon whomsoever He pleases. Thus, even if Parabrahman’s grace is available entirely and equally for everyone, like the rain that showers upon the earth, it is only those who are adequate ‘vessels’ who can receive that grace and make use of it. Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on this in Vac. Sār.11. When Mukṭānanda Svāmi asks, “Personal endeavor is declared in the scriptures, but how much is actually achieved by personal endeavor and how much is achieved by Parabrahman’s grace?” Svāminārāyaṇa remarkably describes a worthy recipient of Parabrahman’s grace. Such a person, he illuminates, strictly observes *dhārmika* disciplines such as “nonviolence and eightfold *brahmacarya*, has an absolutely firm realization of him/herself as the *ātman*, is firmly detached from worldly pleasures and has extreme and enduring devotional faith. These four aspects of *sādhana* correspond to what is traditionally termed within *Svāminārāyaṇa* texts as *dharma* (observance of scriptural injunctions), *jñāna* (*ātman*-Paramātmān realization) (not to be confused with the broader, more philosophical knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman), *vairāgya* (detachment) and *bhakti* (devotion). Cooperatively, they are called ‘*Ekāntika Dharma*’ or ‘*Bhāgavata Dharma*’, which we will learn further is one of the reasons for

Parabrahman's manifestation on earth,"³¹⁹ and which features repeatedly in the *Vacanāmṛta* and *Svāmīni Vāto* as a milieu for pleasing Parabrahman.³²⁰ In Vac. Sār. 11, Svāminārāyaṇa is sure to add that all of these endeavors should be enjoined by the words of a true Guru and the scriptures, before concluding he says: "Parabrahman's grace is only bestowed upon one who has such characteristics." (Vac. Sār. 11, p.228)

Possibly sensing the scale of the task of perfectly cultivating these characteristics, Nityānanda Svāmi firstly acknowledges Svāminārāyaṇa's theme but then instantly asks that what becomes of one who has some deficiency in cultivating these characteristics? Svāminārāyaṇa straightforwardly replies that then he does not attain ultimate liberation, i.e. Parabrahman's Akṣaradhāma. Instead, he attains some other abode of Parabrahman.³²¹ Here, Svāminārāyaṇa refers to the abodes of other *avatāras* and paradisiacal realms of the *devas*, which, in comparison to Akṣaradhāma as good is extremely inferior. After further elaboration, Svāminārāyaṇa concludes by reiterating his answer, this time with added force: "Hence, whether it takes one life or innumerable lives, only when one develops the previously described characteristics and becomes extremely free of worldly desires, does one become a worthy vessel of receiving Parabrahman's grace, and only then will one attain ultimate liberation. Without it, one will definitely not attain it." (Vac. Sār. 11, p.228)

In this way, Svāminārāyaṇa candidly mentions that liberation is a result of Parabrahman's grace only, and that spiritual endeavor is required to receive and apply that liberating grace. BGSB echoes: "विधेयात्मा विधेयः शास्त्रगुर्वदिशवर्ती आत्मा यस्यास्वच्छन्दाचारः प्रसादं गुरुहर्षनुग्रहम् अधिगच्छति प्राप्नोति" (BGSB 2/64, p.64) "A devotee who treads

³¹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 2/46, Gadh. 3/21

³²⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/21, SV 3/25

³²¹ Vac. Sār. 11

the path of righteousness shown by the scriptures and the Guru will attain the grace of Parabrahman and the Guru.” Moreover, the very next verse of the BG declares the benefit of this grace: “all the miseries and problems of that devotee are eliminated and he can engross freely in the form of Parabrahman.”³²² In this manner, the BG invariably demonstrates the micro role of both factors.³²³ The BSSB also highlights this fact.³²⁴

Now, we can figure a connection between the grace and the efforts by this example:

“परमात्मकृपयैव तदुपाकस्य स्वाभीप्सितसकलसाधनोद्योगसंभवात्तद्वृत्ते केवलानां साधनानामकिञ्चित्करत्वात् सच्छास्त्रप्रतिपादिततदलौकिकमाहात्म्यानुसन्धानलक्षणस्तदभिसंबन्धः सर्वत्र साधनेषु नियमेन उपसंहार्य इति भावः”(BSSB 3/3/55, p.351) “Only by the immense grace of Parabrahman, an aspirant can accomplish his spiritual endeavors, without Him, all the spiritual efforts are worthless, so one must add the *brahmabhāva* in his spiritual efforts in order to make them fruitful, which are asserted in the scriptures.” At this stage, an important question is rising: in which form Parabrahman exhibits this grace? Bhadrēśadāsa replies while commentating on KU 2/23, the same verse found in MU 3/2/3 cited above. The answer of this question can be given on the basis of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* that the form of Paramātmān’s grace is like by seeing his devotee sincerely endeavoring by several means to please him, “Parabrahman, the ocean of grace that He is, gifts that devotee access to the profound association of the Akṣarabrahman Guru – who is his Paramātmān’s supreme worshipper, who has the greatest affection for Him, who eternally has a complete and perfect realization of Him, and who can be regarded as His own form - so that his devotee can easily realize him Paramātmān.” Then, by listening, reflecting, etc. upon the Guru’s teachings, and serving him with the belief that he is the very form of Parabrahman - as directed by

³²² BGSB 2/65; p.64

³²³ BG 18/56,58,62,73,75

³²⁴ “प्रत्यक्षब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुदृढतमप्रसंगोपदेशाभिर्ब्रह्मात्मैक्यं संपाद्य प्रत्यक्षपरमात्मसमाराधान लक्षणभक्तावनुष्ठितायां तस्यैवानुग्रहतस्त्विद्व्यस्वरूपं साक्षात्क्रियते” (BSSB 3/2/23, p.300)

such statements as “who has the highest devotion to Parabrahman and, as he does to Parabrahman, also to the Guru (SU 6/23),” etc. – that devotee, having developed oneness with his self and Brahman and having received the grace of Parabrahman, realizes Paramātmā. (KU 2/23) In this way, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School explicitly deciphers the role of Parabrahman’s grace and personal endeavors.

3. *Brahmavidyā*

People perform various spiritual endeavors in order to attain liberation. Out of them, who have taken shelter at the feet of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, learn the way to earn the grace of Brahman and Parabrahman. Consequently, their *sādhana* becomes easy and fruitful. For this process, one must understand the nature of these two eternal ontological entities. In short, the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman is inevitable to attain ultimate liberation. In the general case, *vidyā* means knowledge. Here, Brahman indicates both Brahman; Brahman and Parabrahman.³²⁵ As a result, *brahmavidyā* encompasses the knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman. Now we analyze how this knowledge results in the attainment of liberation.

Svāminārāyaṇa explains it in *Vac. Gadh.* 2/3, using '*brahmajñāna*' for *brahmavidyā*: “Brahman is the cause and support of all, including Prakṛti-Purusha, etc., and pervades everything by its *antaryāmīn* powers... Parabrahman, that is Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa, is distinct from that Brahman, and the supporter and inspirer of Brahman. With such understanding, one should cultivate oneness between one’s *jivātman* and that Brahman and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with him. With such understanding, *brahmajñāna* also becomes a clear path to attaining the highest state of enlightenment.” (*Vac. Gadh.* 2/3, pp.390-391)

³²⁵ BSSB 1/1/1, p.3

Similarly, the MU defines *brahmavidyā*: “येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद सत्यं प्रोवाच तां तत्त्वतो ब्रह्मविद्याम्” (MU 1/2/13) “By which Akṣara and Puruṣottama are truly known is called *brahmavidyā*.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments on this verse: “इत्थमिह 'येनाक्षरं पुरुषं वेद' इत्यक्षरशब्देनाऽक्षरब्रह्माख्यं परमात्मभिन्नं तन्मात्रन्यूनं दिव्यतत्त्वं, पुरुषशब्देन च तदक्षरादपि परभूतं परब्रह्माख्यं दिव्यतत्त्वं ब्रह्मविद्याघटकतया पृथक् पृथक् विज्ञातव्यत्वेन प्रस्थाप्य तद्विव्यतत्त्वद्वयविषयाऽक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसिद्धान्त एव ब्रह्मविद्यारूपेण प्रस्थापितः।” (MUSB 1/2/13, p.257)

“Thus, by the revelation of this *mantra*, ‘Akṣara’ refers to the divine entity Akṣarabrahman, who is ontologically distinct from and inferior only to Paramātmān. The term *puruṣa* on the other hand, refers to the divine entity Parabrahman, who is superior even to Akṣara. By identifying *brahmavidyā* as the means towards realizing these two ontologically distinct entities, the *Akṣarapuruṣottama* Doctrine is understood as an expression of *brahmavidyā*.” In this central announcement, Bhadrēśadāsa aims to show the cosmic role of Akṣarabrahman, its ontological distinction from and sub-ordination to Parabrahman, and also the *ātman*’s need for Akṣarabrahman to properly worship Parabrahman all of which constitute *brahmajñāna brahmavidyā*, or we might call ultimate knowledge.

In the previous chapter, we analyzed the *ātman*’s *karmika* dilemma - incessantly journeying through the cycle of births and deaths - and its cause as ignorance in the form of *māyā*. To disperse this shroud of dark ignorance and break free from this transmigratory cycle, *brahmavidyā* plays a vital role. *Vedāntic* texts unambiguously state: “By knowledge, one attains and enjoys the immortal state.”³²⁶ More specifically, when we analyze the essential role of philosophical knowledge in attaining to liberation from *samsāra*, the *Vacanāmṛta* also enunciates clearly about the both from *śāstric* statements cited in its discourse, such as “There is no liberation

³²⁶ KeU 2/4, IU 11

without knowledge” (*Hiranyakeśīyaśākhāśruti*)³²⁷ and “the knowledge of Parabrahman’s nature and the knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness are the two extraordinary means to liberation.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/57, p.135)

The *Shrutis* state: “Only by knowing Parabrahman does one pass beyond death; there is no other path for attaining liberation.” (SU 3/8) Likewise, many other scriptures declare the knowledge of Parabrahman as the sole means for liberation. “The most accurate description of His immeasurable and unfathomable greatness is that Parabrahman is greater than Akṣarabrahman” (MU 2/1/2). This being so, we cannot really begin to know Parabrahman without first fully knowing Akṣarabrahman, who also reveals Parabrahman’s greatness. Similarly, if knowing Parabrahman is absolutely essential for liberation, and the best that can be said about Him is that He transcends Akṣarabrahman, it follows that knowing Akṣarabrahman is also absolutely fundamental to securing ultimate liberation.

3.1 Knowledge for Information and Knowledge for Transformation

Knowledge of worldly affairs and knowledge of the ultimate reality sound like synonyms, but they are not. Though they all refer to the mind and an accumulation of thoughts and experiences, they have a vast difference in the essence of their meanings and their applications in our life. Knowledge is the accumulation of facts and data that we have acquired through study, research, investigation, observation, or experience, being aware of something and having information. Knowledge is knowing which things, practices, people, and pleasures make us happy. Moreover, those who possess this type of knowledge may not have touched the glory of Parabrahman and the scriptures.³²⁸

³²⁷ Vac. Loya 7

³²⁸ Vac. Var. 11, p.552, Vac. Gadh. 1/50

Knowledge of ultimate spirituality which is sometimes referred to as wisdom, is the ability to discern and judge which aspects of that knowledge are true, right, lasting, and applicable to our life. It's the ability to apply that knowledge to the greater scheme of life. It's also deeper; knowing the meaning or reason, knowing why something is, and what it means to our life. Wisdom is knowing that while those things may bring us pleasure, happiness is not derived from things or situations or people. It is an understanding that happiness comes from within. One acquires knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman in two ways. When an aspirant is in *sādhanaśāstra* (primely spiritual state), whatever he knows or feels is all informative knowledge. Even one who is the master of all Vedic texts and a winner of all philosophical debates still has primary knowledge. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* calls it *aparā vidyā*.³²⁹ It is utterly basic and primary knowledge. It helps the aspirant to earn name, fame, bread and butter. It deals with this physical body and the physical world but it has nothing to do with ultimate spirituality. However, it is still significant because for a true aspirant; it paves the way to the ultimate knowledge, which is known as *parā vidyā*.³³⁰

Parāvidyā, as Bhadrēśadāsa explains, is the *vidyā* by which a spiritual aspirant becomes *brahmarūpa*- attains a state like that of Akṣarabrahman.³³¹ People call it wisdom as well. This knowledge is accomplished through the grace of Parabrahman and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. In this knowledge, the aspirant experiences oneness with Brahman. It is the *siddhaśāstra* (ultimate spiritual state). In this state, he experiences and enjoys the ultimate knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman. That is why it is identified as transformative knowledge. *Aparā vidyā* and *parā vidyā* have no quarrel between them. Though *parā vidyā* is ultimate knowledge, both are valuable and both have a place in our lives. The difficulty lies in the fact that many

³²⁹ MU 1/1/4-5

³³⁰ MU 1/1/4-5

³³¹ MUSB 1/1/5, p.237

of us are unclear as to their differences, often perceiving the terms and their application to be interchangeable. Being clear and consciously aware of how our minds are engaged may be important to get the most out of them. While acquiring and applying information is valuable in and of itself, we also need to distill and judge that information and ultimately find the deeper meaning and relevance to the whole of our lives. Bhadrēśadāsa describes the specific role of each knowledge by commenting them on MU: “*Aparā vidyā* provides supporting information for the explanation of *parā vidyā*.”³³² Furthermore, when an aspirant wants to attain this *parā vidyā*, he must first imbibe *brahmabhāva*.

4. *Brahmabhāva*

Brahmabhāva is the most prominent spiritual endeavor in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition. *Brahmabhāva* encompasses all spiritual endeavors. Bhadrēśadāsa cites:

यद्वैभवात् परा शान्तिः कर्माऽलेपोऽप्यवाप्यते। सुकरः कर्मयोगश्च देहभावनिवारणा॥

स्वजने ममताऽभावः स्त्रीविषयादिनाशनम्। परभक्त्यधिकारित्वं जीवन्मुक्त्यनुभावनम्॥

दिव्यभावोऽक्षरप्राप्तिरित्यादि सहजं भवेत्। इहोच्यते ब्रह्मभावो ब्रह्मसङ्गप्रभावितः॥SSS p.307॥

“Upon attaining *brahmabhāva* through the association of Brahman (Guru), an aspirant attains ultimate peace. The bondage of *karma* and the affection towards his body dissolve. *Karmayoga* becomes easy. The sense of I-ness, my-ness, and attraction towards the opposite gender are removed. He attains the ability for ultimate devotion and experiences divinity and the abode of Parabrahman in this very life.” What exactly is this *brahmabhāva*? Bhadrēśadāsa answers the question in the SSS: *Brahmabhāva* means to acquire oneness with Brahman. One who attains this *brahmabhāva* state is identified as being *brahmarūpa*. Here oneness means to acquire the virtues of Brahman, which are indispensable for attaining ultimate liberation.³³³ Svāminārāyaṇa invariably states the importance of *brahmabhāva*: For utmost devotion - “Only one who is *brahmarūpa* has the right to

³³² MUSB 1/1/5, p.235

³³³ SSS, p.308

offer *bhakti* to Puruṣottama.”(Vac. Loya. 7, p.303) To attain the highest level of *nirvikalpa* faith- “One possessing the highest level of ‘*nirvikalpa* faith’ realizes that countless millions of *brahmāndas*, each encircled by the eight barriers, appear like mere atoms before Akṣara. Such is the greatness of Akṣara, the abode of Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa. One who worships Puruṣottama realizing oneself to be *akṣararup* can be said to possess the highest level of ‘*nirvikalpa* faith.” (Vac. Loya. 7, p.324) Moreover, to become an *ekāntik bhakta* (Vac. Gadh. 1/11), to procure firm conviction of Parabrahman (Vac. Sār. 12), to attain wisdom (Vac. Gadh. 1/56), to achieve *nirvikalpa samādhi* (Vac. Gadh. 1/40), to accomplish *yogayajna* (Vac. Gadh. 2/8), to eradicate *māyic* bondage (Vac. Gadh. 2/30) etc., *brahmabhāva* is indispensable.

4.1 Oneness with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru³³⁴

As we began this chapter, we understood that liberation is a situation of complete spiritual purity and clarity in which the *ātman* becomes *brahmarūpa* - like Brahman. This not only results in eliminating *māyic* impurities born of a material self-misunderstanding but, more positively, acquiring the qualities of Akṣarabrahman. Svāminārāyaṇa makes clear in the Vac. how both are made possible. The *jīva*, however, has united with the body, the senses, and the sense-objects. As a result of this indecorous association, the *jīva* has become one with the body, senses, etc. After forsaking their association, the *jīva* realizes: “My self is Brahman, which transcends and is free from *māyā*. If one amalgamated with Brahman through continuous contemplation in this manner, the *jīva* attains the virtues of Brahman....The *jīva* remains continuously attached to *māyā* ... Only when one continuously associates with Brahman, one’s inspirer, through contemplation - as previously described - is that attachment broken.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p. 460) This

³³⁴ We are using G capital for Akṣarabrahman (*Brahmasvarūpa*) Guru.

constant contemplation³³⁵ on the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru³³⁶ as one's true self is the ultimate *sādhana*.

Guṇātītānanda Svāmi explicates in SV 2/41 on why this association leads to acquiring the qualities of Akṣarabrahman, i.e., becoming *brahmarūpa*: “First, one should attach one's *jīva* to the *ekāntika sādhu*. Because that *sādhu* is absorbed in Parabrahman, he possesses the qualities of Parabrahman. Hence, the *sādhu*'s qualities are imbibed by whoever associates with the *ekāntika sādhu*.” Then stressing the absolute vitality of this form of association with the Guru, he ends the discourse with the following statement: “Whether one applies this method today or after a thousand lives, ultimately, there is no alternative but to apply it.”³³⁷ Correspondingly, the *Upaniṣads* also provide statements regarding joining one's self with Akṣarabrahman. For instance, the BU 1/4/10 proclaims ‘*Aham brahma'smi*’ (I am Brahman).

Bhadreśadāsa comments: “स्वात्मनः सर्वशरीरिभूतेनाक्षरब्रह्मणैक्येनानुसन्धानमकरोद् इति भावः।” (BUSB 1/4/10, p.49) “I am cultivating myself with Akṣarabrahman which is the *śarīrī* (controller) of all being.” Bhadreśadāsa draws our attention that oneness with Guru is a significant spiritual endeavor. Especially in the *Upaniṣads*, we find actual teachings to know or meditate on that Brahman as one's own self (e.g., TU 2/5/1, MU 2/2/5, and MU 2/2/6). One such series of teachings can be found figuratively in MU 2/2/4, where one is called upon to ‘target’ Akṣarabrahman with one's *ātman*, the arrow, and ‘pierce it unflinchingly’. Like an arrow that becomes one with its target, so, in the same fashion, the aspirant of liberation makes the Guru his/her center and becomes one with him (*śaravat tanmayo bhavet*). It's a deep explanation

³³⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/31

³³⁶ In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Tradition the Guru is one of the four form of Akṣarabrahman (Vac. Gadh. 1/63; MU 2/1/1). It incarnates on earth to grant liberation to the countless jivas and *ishvaras* (Vac. Gadh. 1/27,54; KU 3/2, MU 2/2/5). Moreover, Parabrahman manifests through the Guru (Vac. Gadh. 1/27, 3/26, Var.19; KeU 2/4).

³³⁷ SV 2/41

of what the earlier verse in MU 2/2/3 had said, where the oneness is explained as taking on aspects of the Guru's nature (*tadbhāva*). Bhadreśadāsa describes this as a form of awareness (*anusandhāna*), contemplation (*anucintana*) and engrossment (*sanlagnatā*).

The BG tells the same story. To attain *brahmabhāva* is the most important part of the BG. Right from the second chapter of the BG, this incumbent spiritual flow proceeds unto the last chapter. After describing the attributes of an enlightened person, it reveals: “एषा ब्राह्मी स्थितिः” (BG 2/72) “Arjuna, this is the *Brāhmic* state. Attaining this state, one is no longer confused. Gaining this state, even at the end of one's life, a person attains the goal of human life and becomes one with Akṣarabrahman.”

Bhadreśadāsa explains: “ब्राह्मी ब्रह्मणः इयमिति ब्राह्मी साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मसंबन्धिनीति यावद् तदक्षरब्रह्मवरूपगुरुमननप्रकर्षलभ्या स्वात्मानस्तदक्षरब्रह्मगुणसाधार्म्यलक्षणतद्भावरूपापरमात्मोपासनपरमानुकूला स्थितिः।” (BGSB 2/72, p.68) “*Brāhmic* is related to Akṣarabrahman, the great glorified state which is attained through Akṣarabrahman. An aspirant attains this state by constant and unwavering thinking of the Akṣarabrahman Guru; then, he imbibes the qualities of that Brahman through which he can engross in the utmost devotion of Parabrahman.” This principle is seen in every chapter of the BG while discussing the various topics: To achieve *karma yoga* (3/30, 4/25), to attain *jīvanmukti* (liberation while living on earth) (5/19, 20, 21); to become a *yogi* (6/8, 9, 27, 28); to become a *jnāni* (7/17,18); to know the process of the association with Brahman (8/13); to accomplish the *jnānyajna* (9/15); to gain *adhyātmavidyā* (10/32); to exposed the concealed knowledge (11/1); to attain Parabrahman (12/5); to eradicate the obstacles hindering perfect devotion (13/11) to become *gunātita* (14/26); to acquire a place in Akṣaradhām(15/5); to highlight the divine qualities (16/1); to express the *Oṇakāra* (17/24) and the acme narration of eighteenth chapter: “Giving up body-consciousness, violence, pride, lust, anger, and desire for possession; free

from the feeling of ‘I and my’, and peaceful; one becomes fit for attaining oneness with Brahman.” (18/53) The peaceful one who is absorbed in Akṣarabrahman neither grieves nor desires. He becomes *brahmarūpa* and obtains the highest devotion for Parabrahman.” (18/54)

In the various documented discourses, Svāminārāyaṇa establishes this fact. Svāminārāyaṇa puts forward: “One should develop a conviction of one’s *ātman* as follows: One develops *ātmabuddhi* with the *santa* who has attained the manifest form of Parabrahman, and one should believe only that *santa* to be one’s self.” (Vac. Jet. 1, p.691). As far as the *Brahmasūtra* is concerned, the term ‘*ātmabuddhi*’, means oneness with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, is described explicitly there. This also helps explain how the association with the Guru is a form of loving devotion. This is found in the *Ātmagrhyadhikarana* (BS 3/3/15-18), where Bhadreśadāsa links ‘*grhiti*’ literally, ‘acceptance’ to ‘*buddhi*’ (perception), thus centering the discussion on *ātmabuddhi*. He eulogizes such Guru-centered self-perception as the best and most key means to serving Parabrahman.³³⁸

Bhadreśadāsa highlights: “ब्रह्मात्मैक्यलक्षणया अस्य आत्मगृहितीरेव परमात्मोपासनसाधनेषु श्रेष्ठत्वादित्यर्थः।” (BSSB 3/3/15, p.324) “*Ātmagrihiti*, which is known as the firm oneness with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, is the most prominent spiritual endeavor of all spiritual endeavors to complete *upāsanā* towards Parabrahman.” In this way, in the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedanta oneness with Guru is the most prominent spiritual endeavor.

5. The Role of the Guru in *Sāadhanā*

गुरुर्ब्रह्मा गुरुर्विष्णुर्गुरुर्देवो महेश्वरो।

गुरुः साक्षात्परब्रह्म तस्मै श्रीगुरुवे नमः॥

³³⁸ BSSB 3/3/15-18, pp.323-326

The *Guru-Gītā* adorns the Guru as Parabrahman,³³⁹ convincingly, “The *Guru-Gītā* is the celebrated *Samskṛta* hymn exalting the figure of the authoritative spiritual master.”³⁴⁰ Like Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman also incarnates in this world with a human-like form as the Guru.³⁴¹ This is a unique principle of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy. The ultimate objective of life is the realization of *brahmavidyā*. This objective is attained through the association with the Akṣarabrahman Guru.³⁴² *Brahmabhāva* (qualitative oneness) is inevitable to offer devotion to Parabrahman.³⁴³ That *brahmabhāva* is possible only by the association with the Guru.³⁴⁴ Thus, it is necessary to seek refuge under such a Guru to realize *brahmavidyā*. That Guru must be Akṣarabrahman himself. This principle is clearly elaborated within the SB³⁴⁵: “अनेन नित्यं परमात्मनिष्ठः साक्षाद् अक्षरब्रह्मैव ब्रह्मविद्याया विज्ञापयिता गुरुर्भवितुम् अर्हति नान्य इति सिद्धान्तितम्”³⁴⁶ “Only one who is Akṣarabrahman himself has the firm conviction of Parabrahman and is the master of preaching *Brahmavidyā*.” We discussed earlier in the previous chapter that Akṣarabrahman has four forms. Out of these four, one form is incarnated on earth as the Guru. Only through this Guru, one can attain *brahmabhāva* and is able to offer undeviating devotion towards Parabrahman. The Guru is identified in the *Vacanāmṛta* with many names such as *satpuruṣa*, *santa*, *ekāntika santa*, etc. Now we will discuss how spiritual endeavors which are not possible without the Guru.

5.1 Ideal for *Sādhana*

Bhadreśadāsa explains:

गुरोर्ज्ञानमिव ज्ञानं वर्तनमपि तत्समम् ।

³³⁹ Gurugītā – 195/44

³⁴⁰ Rigopoulos Antonio, *Guru the Spiritual Master in Eastern and Western Traditions*, p.169, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 2002

³⁴¹ Vac. Var.19

³⁴² Vac. Gadh. 3/27

³⁴³ Vac. Loyā. 7

³⁴⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/51

³⁴⁵ MU 1/2/12

³⁴⁶ MUSB 1/2/12, p.254

“Becoming one with Akṣarabrahman means having an understanding like that of the Akṣarabrahman Guru, behaving like the Akṣarabrahman Guru, and dedicating one’s physical being towards *bhakti* as the Akṣarabrahman Guru does.” The Guru is first, foremost, and always the perfect devotee. Hence, he provides a model for all others to try to be like. Therefore, if ‘oneness’ with Brahman is an acquisition of the Guru’s virtues, in becoming more like him (Brahman-like, or *brahmarūpa*), it follows that these *brāhmic* qualities foster and boost the highest devotional relationship of the aspirant with Parabrahman, which is itself a mark of liberation. Nevertheless, a spiritual aspirant has an example on which to model his/her sustained endeavors and intentions and craft a spiritually pure life that leads to Parabrahman, like the Guru’s. This should not, however, be demoted to understand the Guru’s role. Bhadrēśadāsa corroborates by giving the example of the *Īśāvāsyā* principle:³⁴⁷

“The *Īśāvāsyā* principle can be easily understood through the life of the *satpuruṣa* (Guru), since the life of the *satpuruṣa* is a living commentary on the elusive words of *śāstra*.³⁴⁸ A devotee who endeavors to offer devotion to Parabrahman faces external and internal myriad complications, hurdles, and hindrances.³⁴⁹ Consequently, a number of aspirants abjure the path of spirituality. Here, the Guru comes and helps them to recover from their miseries and again inspires them to walk on the path of liberation.

5.2 To Attain *Brahmabhāva*

We vastly analyzed *brahmabhāva* in the previous sub-topic. Svāminārāyaṇa called it *ātmabuddhi* or immense love towards the Guru. Such *ātmabuddhi* with the Guru

³⁴⁷ IU 16

³⁴⁸ Bhadrēśadāsa Sādhū, *Essence of the Upaniṣads, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2012. p.20

³⁴⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/39, 1/44, 3/1, 3/21

most readily manifest itself as concentrated spiritual love, what Bhadrēśadāsa calls ‘*Prakṛṣṭānūrāgodbhāva*’,³⁵⁰ “because the aspirant of liberation is now attached to the Guru, not the body or its associates. The Guru becomes the priority, the ultimate focus of all devotion and efforts, not worldly matters or *māyic* pleasures. Even while assiduously fulfilling every personal and social responsibility, all actions, thoughts, and intentions of the aspirant are now instilled with a spiritual awareness of the Guru and thus take on a wholly devotional character and spirit. This releases the aspirant of his/ her *karmika* bondage.”³⁵¹ Svāminārāyaṇa therefore confirms: “For an aspirant who desires his own liberation, nothing in this universe is more blissful than Parabrahman and his *santa*. Therefore, just as a person has *ātmabuddhi* towards his own body, he should similarly have *ātmabuddhi* with Parabrahman and his *santa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/7, p.593) This is not limited to the body only but it includes relatives of the body as well and specifying the relationship as one of profound love towards the Guru. Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa states *ātmabuddhi* is attained through the Guru only.³⁵²

5.3 The Gateway to Liberation

Svāminārāyaṇa expresses, “*Bhāgavad dharma* is upheld by maintaining profound love towards the *ekāntika santa* or *sādhu* of Parabrahman, who possesses the attributes of dharma, knowledge, detachment, and devotion coupled with the knowledge of Parabrahman’s greatness. Maintaining profound love towards such a *sādhu* also opens the gateway to liberation.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/54, p.129) Bhadrēśadāsa also supports it while commenting on the KU. He explains ‘अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन हर्षशोकौ जहाति’ as by the company of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru one is released from all his miseries and becomes a *Jīvanamukta*.³⁵³ Moreover, the wise sage Kapila teaches

³⁵⁰ BSSB 3/3/15, p.324

³⁵¹ BG 2/72, 18/54, BS 3/3/15

³⁵² Vac. Gadh. 2/59, Vac. Gadh. 1/54, MU 2/2/3,4,5, KU 3/2

³⁵³ KUSB 2/12, p.96

that affection (for others) firmly binds the *ātman*. However, if that same affection is directed towards the *Sādhu*, the gateway to liberation is opened.³⁵⁴

Svāminārāyaṇa's intention is clear that the Guru is the gateway to liberation. An intense and loving association with him opens that gateway.³⁵⁵ Svāminārāyaṇa emphasizes in another important statement: “Intense love for the *satpuruṣa* Guru is itself the means to realizing one's *ātman*, is itself also the means to realizing the greatness of the *satpuruṣa* and is itself also the means to having the direct realization of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Var. 11, p.553) Outstandingly, Svāminārāyaṇa provides a doctrine here that love for the Guru not only leads to a realization of the Guru and the *ātman* (self), with whom the individual develops a spiritual relationship, but also of Parabrahman. It again indicates to the substantive presence of Parabrahman within the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, and expounds the *Śvetāśvetara Upaniṣad*'s³⁵⁶ call to offer the highest devotion to the Guru on par with that offered to Parabrahman.

The *Vedaras* also goes on the same principle, where Svāminārāyaṇa repeatedly explains that such *ātmabuddhi* with Akṣarabrahman leads to *jīvanamukti*. For illustration, in one part of the letter, after narrating the cosmic powers of Akṣarabrahman, he enhances that that Akṣarabrahman is among us, referring to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru in human form. Svāminārāyaṇa then teaches: “O *Paramahaṃsas*! One should develop *ātmabuddhi* with him Akṣarabrahman, and with that thought, become a *jīvan-mukta* (living liberated *ātman*).” (VR, p.166)

5.4 For the Supreme Devotion Towards Parabrahman

It is extremely difficult to attain true conviction of the form of Parabrahman.³⁵⁷ Since our *indriyas* and *antaḥkaraṇas* are *māyic*, whereas Parabrahman is not

³⁵⁴ *Śrīmad Bhāgavat* 3/25/20

³⁵⁵ MU 3/1/8, MU 2/2/7

³⁵⁶ यस्य देवे परा भक्तिः यथा देवे तथा गुरौ । तस्यैते कथिता ह्यर्थाः प्रकाशन्ते महात्मनः ॥SU 6/23॥

³⁵⁷ Vac. Loya 18

māyic,³⁵⁸ hence, Parabrahman is imperceptible to our *māyic indriyas* and inner faculties.³⁵⁹ Thus, the *santa* becomes the means to help us achieve the true conviction of Parabrahman and acquire the privilege to offer devotion to him. Bhadreśadāsa asserts: “प्रतिबोधविदितं परमात्मस्वरूपनिश्चयाय शिष्येण जिज्ञासिते सति तं प्रति ब्रह्मस्वरूपेण गुरुणा दीयमान उपदेश एव प्रतिबोधः, तेन विदितमिति प्रतिबोधविदितमिति” (KeUSB 2/4, p.44) “When an aspirant asks the way to attain the firm conviction of Parabrahman, the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru gives the discoursing which is called ‘*pratibodha*’. Through this preaching, he attains the firm conviction of Parabrahman and is able to offer devotion to Parabrahman.”

In this manner, the Guru is the mediator between *ātmans* and Parabrahman, making possible the personal encounter that Svāminārāyaṇa had stressed, was the reason for Parabrahman’s manifestation on earth.³⁶⁰ Similarly, then, to see the Guru is to see Parabrahman; to have been blessed by the Guru is to have been blessed by Parabrahman.

5.5 To Understand the *Śāstras*

The Indian ancient *śāstras*, texts or scriptures-exegesis requires one to go further than the rules of language, theoretical interpretation, and grammar, for it is the *samādhi bhāṣa*. It needs non-literal interpretations for understanding many obscure passages and their sequential order, ideas, arguments and themes. The difficult philosophical and spiritual elements involve the use of figurative language, symbols, metaphors, analogical arguments and anecdotes which inevitably complicate and extend the task of the Vedic exegesis. Svāminārāyaṇa adds that understanding the scriptures without the Guru leads us in the opposite direction.³⁶¹

³⁵⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/51, Vac. kar. 1

³⁵⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/78, Vac. Panch. 4

³⁶⁰ Vac. Kār. 5

³⁶¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/13, Loya. 11, Var.12

Therefore, Bhadrēśādāsa discloses the ultimate fact: “गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थस्तु प्रकाशयेत्”³⁶²
“Truth is only revealed when *śāstra* is heard from the Guru’s mouth.”

Thus, human intellect, logic, speculations or hypotheses cannot do righteousness to the central theme of the Vedas and the scriptures. Only the Guru, who is in perpetual communion with Parabrahman,³⁶³ knows the intention of Parabrahman and thereby is able to interpret the Vedic exegesis thoroughly. Consequently, the role and importance of the Akṣarabrahman Guru is highly extolled both for fathoming the thorough meaning and insinuations of the scriptures³⁶⁴ and correctly molding one’s thought process.

5.6 The Way to Serve the Guru

Svāminārāyaṇa elaborates on how to serve the Guru in Vac. Var. 5 by directing equal service of both Parabrahman and the Guru, further establishing the full presence of Parabrahman in the Guru. He affirms: “Just as one implements the *mānsi pūjā* (worship by mental visualization) of Parabrahman, if one also implements the *mānsi pūjā* of the highest *Bhakta* along with Parabrahman; and just as one arranges an offering of food for Parabrahman, similarly, if one also arranges an offering for Parabrahman’s highest *Bhakta* and serves it to him; and just as one donates five rupees to Parabrahman, similarly, if one also donates money to the *Santa* - then, by performing with extreme affection such equal service of Parabrahman and *Santa* who possesses the highest qualities, even if such a person

³⁶² SSSK 271

³⁶³ Vac. Gadh. 3/27

³⁶⁴ गुरुश्च पञ्चमो वेदस्तच्छब्दश्रेष्ठता ततः॥२६०॥

सिद्धान्ताऽनुगमन्यतु सर्वथा साम्प्रदायिकम्।

गुरुप्रमाणितं ह्येव प्रामाण्यपदवीं भजेत्॥२६२॥

शास्त्रशब्दोऽपि नो सेव्यो गुरोराश्रयणं विना।

गुरुमुखाच्छ्रुतं शास्त्रं सदर्थस्तु प्रकाशयेत् ॥२७१॥

गुरुहरिबलं श्रेष्ठं शास्त्रवचोबलादपि।

शास्त्रात्तु केवलात् क्वापि न ज्ञानं निश्चयः सुखम्॥२७२॥

अतः शास्त्रं बलीयो न साक्षाद् ब्रह्माऽक्षराद् गुरोः ।

नाऽसत्याद् वारयेच्छास्त्रं गुरुस्तु वारयेत् ततः॥२७३॥

साक्षाद्देवो भवेद् वाक्यं स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः ।

is a devotee of the lowest caliber and was destined to become a devotee of the highest caliber after two lives, or after four lives, or after ten lives, or after a hundred lives, he will become a devotee of the highest caliber in this very life. Such are the fruits of the equal service of Parabrahman and Parabrahman's *Bhakta*.” (Vac. Var. 5, p.542) The *Sūtrakāra* reveals the same truth that serving the Guru is thus serving Parabrahman, the fruit of which can accelerate one spiritually a hundred-fold.³⁶⁵

The *Gītā* declares: ‘तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥’³⁶⁶

The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “ये हि ज्ञानिनः श्रोत्रियाः शास्त्ररहस्यज्ञाः तत्त्वदर्शिनः भगवन्नित्यदर्शना सकलशब्दबोध्यपरमतत्त्वपरमात्मसाक्षात्कारवन्तश्च साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरवः ते तुभ्यं ज्ञानं ब्रह्मविद्याम् उपदेक्ष्यन्ति”(BGSB 4/34, p.110) “Acquire this Parabrahman's knowledge from a Parabrahman -realized Guru by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. These *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus (plural application also includes the manifestation of the Gurus in the future) who have realized the truth will teach you.”

The *Upaniṣad* asserts: ‘तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत् समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम्’³⁶⁷ “In order to understand that *brahmavidyā*, one must go to the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, who has realized the extract of scriptures and has a firm conviction of Parabrahman.” For the attainment of knowledge and resolute understanding of Parabrahman the best faith, good spatial-temporal conditions and the best preacher with superlative knowledge and conviction of Parabrahman is required. And in the company of a true *sādhū* (Akṣara Guru), a person of firm faith gains all virtues, including the right knowledge. An aspirant who has trust and faith in the words of the Guru alone gains the right knowledge and resolute understanding of the nature of Parabrahman; he alone leftovers unfaltering in *dharma* and attains liberation. Svāminārāyaṇa invariably expresses the glory of such a *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru in his teachings as

³⁶⁵ BS 3/3/20

³⁶⁶ BG 4/34

³⁶⁷ MUSB 1/2/12

well.³⁶⁸ He discloses this in terms of: having firm association of the *satpuruṣa*, the importance of the company of a *santa* and the need to develop intense attachment towards such a *sadhu*. By becoming a pupil of a Guru, who is the manifest form of Akṣara, one obtains Puruṣottama's favor.

5.7 Warning

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, the Guru is the key to attain liberation; he is the manifest form of Akṣara, so one should beware of spiting him. Svāminārāyaṇa also firmly and repeatedly warns against hurting or maligning him, often showing dire and irreparable consequences if one does this thing.³⁶⁹ By the way, Vac. Var. 14 is especially noteworthy for its mention of seeking the refuge of the *satpuruṣa* and the pre-eminence of this above other forms of *dharmic* living.

Thus, if one is in quest of the refuge of the *satpuruṣa*, who is the manifest form of Parabrahman, regardless of how terrible a sinner a person may be, he becomes extremely pure and attains *samādhi*. Conversely, a person who maligns the *satpuruṣa* is still a terrible sinner regardless of how sincere he may seem to be in abiding by *dharma*. Moreover, he can never have the realization of Parabrahman in his heart and will be the subject of suffering in the cycle of death and birth.³⁷⁰ When the Guru is pleased, the devotee experiences togetherness with Parabrahman. He realizes Parabrahman in his heart and experiences the highest joy of divine abode in an embodied state here on the earth. All his sins and stock of deeds get consumed promptly and his *vāsanā* (desires) perishes. In this manner, a seeker who wants to attain ultimate liberation should always insist on harboring affection towards the Guru, and keep him in the center point of the *sādhana* in order to achieve the grace

³⁶⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/27, 37, Var 11, Gadh. 3/26

³⁶⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/1, Gadh. 1/35, Gadh. 1/53, Gadh. 1/58, Gadh. 1/73, Sār. 18, Loyā. 1, Gadh. 2/46, Gadh. 3/12

³⁷⁰ BGSB 9/12, p.210

of Parabrahman. Thus, the Guru possesses a prominent place within *Svāminārāyaṇa Sādhana*.

5.8 Is the Guru the Ultimate Goal?

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy, the Guru plays a vital role to accomplish any type of spiritual endeavor an aspirant engrosses in. However, the Guru is not the ultimate entity or an ultimate spiritual goal for an aspirant. The ultimate and supreme goal is only Parabrahman. Even though, when a seeker, after death, goes to the abode of Parabrahman, which is another form of Akṣarabrahman Guru, yet the ultimate goal is Parabrahman, who resides there with infinitive qualities. However, what then is the meaning of the *Śrutis* which say: ‘Gurumevābhigacchet’³⁷¹ or ‘lakṣyam tadeva Akṣara.’³⁷² One may question that if Puruṣottama is the ultimate goal, then why does this *mantra* identify Brahman (Akṣarabrahman) as the final goal?

Bhadreśadāsa explains: “अक्षराधिपतिरेव लक्ष्यमिति तु सिद्धान्त एव तथापि ब्रह्मभावाप्तभक्तानुभूयमानः स स्वदिव्यधाम्नि सदैव विराजमानस्तिष्ठति अत तत्परब्रह्मप्राप्तीच्छया एव तदधिष्ठानरूपस्य ब्रह्मलक्ष्यत्वम्” (MUSB 2/2/4, p.273) “The goal is Parabrahman only, who is beyond Akṣarabrahman; it is the principle. Obviously, Parabrahman resides in Akṣaradhāma, so if someone wishes to achieve Parabrahman, generally means to attain Akṣaradhāma.”

There is no doubt that Puruṣottama, the lord of Akṣara, is the ultimate goal. Nevertheless, since Puruṣottama is forever present in his divine abode, Brahmadhāman (Akṣaradhāma), the desire to attain Parabrahman encompasses the desire to attain Brahmadhāman.³⁷³ He further argues that this is similar to how wanting to meet one’s beloved in some village also includes wanting to reach or

³⁷¹ MU 1/2/12

³⁷² MU 2/2/3

³⁷³ This is also discussed in BSSB. 3/3/24.

attain that village. It is also similar to how desiring to attain gold, gems, and other precious materials affixed to a casket includes wanting the casket itself. Additionally, Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa also confirms attaining Akṣaradhāma, the abode form of Akṣarabrahman, as the goal within his teachings.³⁷⁴ By analogizing Akṣarabrahman with the aim in this *mantra*, the *Upaniṣad* discloses Akṣara to be distinct from the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, who are identified as the arrow. Vyāsa also presents a similar discussion on this topic within the *Brahmasūtra*.³⁷⁵

Svāminārāyaṇa writes in his letter that he who offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman Puruṣottama Paramātmān while realizing one's *ātman* to be one with Akṣara is worthy of great honor. However, Svāminārāyaṇa simplifies in the same passage that there should be no perception of selfhood with Parabrahman. "He who does not have a servant-master relationship with Puruṣottama, but behaves as if one with him, is worthy of scorn." (VR 214) Exclusively, in another part of the letter, Svāminārāyaṇa formulates reference to himself as 'Parabrahman Puruṣottama Paramātmān' before explicitly instructing: "O *Paramahaṃsas*! Offer *upāsanā* to me while having *ātmabuddhi* with that (Brahman)." (VR 158) Svāminārāyaṇa elucidates the vast difference between him and the Akṣarabrahman Guru in the *Vacanāmṛta*: "Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is the controller of all, all-doer, the cause of all; He is extremely attractive, extremely radiant, and extremely powerful; also, He possesses the *kartum*, *akartum* and *anyathākartum* powers. If He wishes, He can eclipse all of the liberated *ātmans* of Akṣaradhāma by His own divine light and prevail alone. Also, if He wishes, He can accept the devotion of the liberated *ātmans* and reside with them. He can eclipse even Akṣara, in the form of Akṣaradhāma in which He dwells and presides alone independently. If He so chooses, He is capable of supporting the countless liberated *ātmans* by His own power, without even needing Akṣaradhāma." (Vac. Loya 13, p.327)

³⁷⁴ "The abode of Paramātmān is the goal." Vac. Gadh. 2/22

³⁷⁵ 'Bhedavyapadeshat' BS 1/3/5

It is Parabrahman's eternal wish that Akṣarabrahman does its ultimate works like creating the universe etc.³⁷⁶ moreover, Parabrahman eternally dwells in the Akṣarabrahman Guru.³⁷⁷ That is why a seeker can take refuge in the Guru. At that time, that inquirer attaches with the Guru by the firm conviction that he is the manifest form of Parabrahman. This principle shows the classical appellation for the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedānta denoted as Akṣarabrahma-Parābrahma-Darśana.

6. Śaraṇāgati (Refuge)

To take refuge or total surrender at the feet of Parabrahman is the brighter and live part of Indian *bhakti* tradition. *Śaraṇāgati*, *āśraya*, *prāpti* etc. are synonyms for taking refuge in Parabrahman. The greater the knowledge of the glory and greatness of Parabrahman, the stronger is the love, attachment, and devotion to Parabrahman. *Śaraṇāgati* (complete surrendering) is a fundamental part of devotion. A servitude (*dāsabhāva*) cannot be comprehended without total submission or surrender of one's yearnings and will at the feet of Parabrahman. *Dāsabhāva* can erase ego totally and eliminate attachment to one's body, which is a very significant endeavor in the way of liberation. Consequently, surrendering (*prapatti*) has a glorious place in Svāminārāyaṇa's philosophy. However, it does not accept the view that a single act of surrender is the end of all efforts. Svāminārāyaṇa does not accept the hypothesis that a surrendered one has nothing to do and that now the whole responsibility of a devotee rests exclusively on Parabrahman. It is true that the surrendered is redeemed of all fears, sins, metempsychosis etc. Nevertheless, the surrendered one ought to act in accordance with Parabrahman's command and will in order to please Him and receive His grace.

³⁷⁶ MU 1/1/7,

³⁷⁷ Vac. Gadh. 1/41

Svāminārāyaṇa discloses the highest glory of *āśraya*: “Accepting the firm refuge of Parabrahman is the greatest and only endeavor amongst all spiritual endeavors for pleasing Parabrahman. That refuge, though, must be extremely steady and without any inadequacies.” (Vac.Gadh. 1/33, p.86) Although, the firm refuge of Parabrahman is titled the greatest endeavor, then someone may question the importance of Parabrahman’s command, norms, and the rules and regulations of the *satsaṅga* fellowship. Svāminārāyaṇa unpacks the principle of balance in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Liberation is possible only through Parabrahman, whereas those other spiritual endeavors and norms are for the purpose of pleasing Parabrahman. That is the only solution to the question.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/66, p.522) In this way, to counteract and annihilate the effects of past *karmas* and to overcome the effects of the *māyā-avidyā*, one must come in contact of (perceptibly) the all-transcendent Puruṣottama.³⁷⁸ Similarly, the BG advocates:

सर्वधर्मान्परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज ।

अहं त्वा सर्वपापेभ्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥³⁷⁹

“Totally relinquish all *dharma*s (duties as conceived by you) and seek me alone as a refuge. I shall definitely release you from all sins. Grieve not.” Bhadrēśadāsa adds in his commentary that “मामित्येकवचनेनैवैकत्वसिद्धावापि पुनरेकमित्यनन्यशरणागत्युपदेशाय” (BGSB 18/66, p.368) “Although, the word ‘*mām*’ is able to provoke un-faltering refuge, yet the term ‘*eka*’ word consolidates this *śaraṇāgati* towards Parabrahman.” Furthermore, Bhadrēśadāsa elucidates that, there are two *śaraṇāgati* mentioned in the *Gītā*. The first *śaraṇāgati* was taken by Arjuna in the second chapter. And now in the last chapter, Bhagavān himself talks about *śaraṇāgati*. The main distinction 14 between these two faces of *śaraṇāgati* can be defined by its giver-taker relationship. In the second chapter, Arjuna is not firm to accept *śaraṇāgati*; however, he goes to Kṛṣṇa directly and seeks refuge based on his own term. On the other hand, in the last chapter, Kṛṣṇa has delivered his full wisdom to Arjuna, realizing that Arjuna,

³⁷⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/73, Iya 10, Gadh. 2/10, 2/13, 2/35, Var. 5, Gadh. 3/35, Jet. 1

³⁷⁹ BG 18/6

now, is mature and able to accept undeviated *śaraṇāgati* at the feet of Parabrahman. As a result, he grants *śaraṇāgati* to Arjuna.

Thus, whatever way one surrenders, be it with blind faith like a doltish, or be it out of self-interest or be it out of intense love for Parabrahman or be it with right knowledge/understanding (*mudhatvena*, *vaiśvānavena*, *svārthena*, *snehena*, *Jñānen*), but it has to be the total submission to Parabrahman without any gap in it.³⁸⁰ In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, Kṛṣṇa says; “As apart from my pious devotees to whom I am the highest goal, I covet neither myself nor Śrī (My consort) who is eternal (like myself), O holy sage! How dare I forsake them who, having renounced all attachments for their wife, house, children, and relation (nay) their (very) life and wealth and their welfare in this and the other world, have sought me as their protector?”³⁸¹ Additionally, The *Mahābhārata* reiterates: “Those who seek refuge in Parabrahman, are never deluded/infatuated and the Lord Janārdana redeems all of them from the most deadening fear of hell.”³⁸² And the *Gītā* reaffirms that “This divine *māyā* of mine consisting of three *guṇas* is extremely difficult to cross over. However, those who take refuge in me alone cross beyond it.”³⁸³ “Therefore, those who “supplicate to Him for shelter with all thy being, O Arjuna; they by His grace attain supreme peace and eternal abode.”³⁸⁴

Therefore, Parabrahman alone is the redeemer of *ātmans* and *īśvaras*. Ultimate emancipation cannot be attained unless one seeks refuge at the feet of Parabrahman with a resolute and unyielding faith in His power of granting liberation. Thus, one ought to surrender one’s ātman totally to Parabrahman, and devotedly associate oneself with Parabrahman, and do all that is required to prompt the grace of Parabrahman. The form of Parabrahman is the truth, so pure and perfect that

³⁸⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/33

³⁸¹ *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* 9/4/64-65

³⁸² MBT *Bhīṣma parva* 64/20

³⁸³ BG 7/14

³⁸⁴ BG 18/62

however imperfect and impure we may be, He undoubtedly purifies and perfects us, when we wholeheartedly affiliate, love, and surrender ourselves to Him, with the conviction that He is eternally divine and faultless.³⁸⁵ When it is realized that no degree of self-effort and knowledge is sufficient to draw the grace of Parabrahman, the inclination for a total refuge at the feet of Parabrahman is the only way. As a result, the servitude nature of an aspirant develops.

6.1 Guru-śaraṇāgati

The Indian Vedic tradition invariably acknowledges the Guru's *śaraṇāgati*, taking refuge at the feet of the Guru. To realize the glory of Parabrahman and to cultivate one's faith in Parabrahman, *Guru-śaraṇāgati* is inevitable. Especially when Parabrahman is not present in his own form on earth, then the Guru, who is the manifest form of Parabrahman, is the only choice for the revelation of Parabrahman. Svāminārāyaṇa proclaims: "However, when Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is not manifest on this earth, one should seek the refuge of the *santa* who has the realization of Parabrahman - because the *jīva* can also accomplish liberation through him." (Vac. Var. 10, p.550)

Svāminārāyaṇa reiterates the power of *Guru-śaraṇāgati*: "Therefore, by seeking the refuge of the *satpuruṣa*, regardless of how terrible a sinner a person may be, he becomes extremely pure, untainted, and attains *samādhi*." (Vac. Var. 10, p.558) In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, it is declared that Parabrahman perpetually manifests (*pragaṭa*, *pratyakṣa*) on earth, whether He is in the guise of a monarch or a *sādhu*, He is the subject and object of the highest contemplation and meditation. Both the forms are equally adorable and worshipfully admirable. The two (Parabrahman manifest as a monarch and as a *sādhu*) do not seem to have resemblance in terms of overt appearance and conduct; still, both are the same because both of them

³⁸⁵ Vac. Gadh. 3/35

definitely have the power and excellence to redeem the *ātman* who seek refuge at their feet. Accordingly, the two forms of Parabrahman seem to differ in external appearance (body-figure), ways of working, and life-style. They nevertheless have the same power and transcendental divinity to redeem the seekers of their refuge. They, as such, are nondifferent despite differences seen in them from our conditioned perspective. In this manner, The ancient scriptures also corroborate the Guru-*śaraṇāgati*. The BG extols:

तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया । उपदेक्ष्यन्ति ते ज्ञानं ज्ञानिनस्तत्त्वदर्शिनः ॥³⁸⁶

“Acquire this ultimate knowledge from the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. The wise who have realized Parabrahman will teach you.”

Bhadreśadāsa provides a unique principle by commenting on this verse: “यद्यपीदानीन्तु साक्षादहमेव तव गुरूपदेष्टृभूतः किन्तु भविष्यति काले मन्त्रनाट्यलीलासमाप्त्यनन्तरमपि ममात्मभूतान् मत्परमप्रीतिमतः मन्निकटतमान् साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपज्ञानिगुरुन् द्वारीकृत्य तत्कार्यं करिष्ये इति ।” (BGSB 4/34, p.110) “The use of the future tense ‘उपदेक्ष्यन्ति’ reveals a sublime principle. Parabrahman wants to say to Arjuna that at present, I am here, as your Guru and Parabrahman both, but in the future, when I finish all my human-like activities and will return to the abode of mine, I will accomplish my work of granting liberation to the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* through the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru succession, since they are utmost near to my beloved devotees and me.”

Human nature, however offensive (*pāmara*) and fallen (*patita*) may be, but if the aspirant submits himself totally to Parabrahman or His best devotee (*sādhū*), he too becomes qualified for the final release. Hence, *śaraṇāgati* with firm faith in the feet of Parabrahman is the best of all means to please Parabrahman. Even Nārada accepts the refuge of Guru Sanatkumāra for peace and happiness: “अधीहि भगव इति

³⁸⁶ BG 4/34

होपससाद सनत्कुमारं नारदः”³⁸⁷ “Nārada takes refuge of Sanatkumāra and said, ‘Teach me, Sir’” Similarly, the MU also confirms this fact, where the Guru-*śaraṇāgati* is consolidated: “तद्विज्ञानार्थं स गुरुमेवाभिगच्छेत्समित्पाणिः श्रोत्रियं ब्रह्म निष्ठम् ॥”³⁸⁸ “The pupil must go and take refuge under the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, who has the revelation of all scriptures and has a firm conviction of Parabrahman.”

Bhadreśadāsa comments here: “ब्रह्मविद्या तु अक्षरब्रह्मगुरुसमाश्रयेण एव संपादयितुं शक्या”(MUSB 1/2/12, p.256) “*Brahmavidyā* is accomplished only through the refuge of the Akṣarabrahman Guru.” In this manner, like Parabrahman, the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru is also the appropriate person to whom a seeker can approach and take refuge at his feet in order to free from the clutch of *māyā*, since the Guru is the manifest form of Parabrahman.

6.2 The Process of *Āśrayagrahaṇa*

Svāminārāyaṇa states: “Irrespective of how evil a person may be before joining the *satsaṅga* fellowship, he should be admitted into *satsaṅga* after he takes the appropriate vows.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/18, p.55) When a seeker takes refuge at the feet of Parabrahman, through a process of initiation called ‘*vartamāna*’, he is assured of freedom from the whole stock of past *karmas* known as *sañcita-karma*. This implies that he will be relieved from the transmigratory cycles of birth and death forever. However, the surrendered one has to work out all the necessary efforts, acquire the appropriate resolute knowledge, and obey all codes and commands of Parabrahman faithfully; failing here means he loses the golden opportunity of freedom forever. Thus, the act of initiation does not give the surrendered one a license to act in an unrestrained or immoral and unethical way.

³⁸⁷ CU 7/1/1

³⁸⁸ MU 1/2/12

First of all, an aspirant must have a burning desire to be free from the clutch of *māyā*. Secondly, he must be polite and childlike aumous. Then he should approach the Guru or Parabrahman. Bhadreśādāsa explains the system of *āśraya grahaṇa* from the MU: “शौनको महाशालो विधिवत् शास्त्रादिष्टविध्यनुसारं समित्पान्याधिर्भूत्वा उपसन्न :”(MUSB 1/1/3, p. 233) “Śaunaka the son of Sunaka, was wealthy. His great sacrificial hall attested his wealth. One day, Śaunaka approached Aṅgiras in a traditional manner, he approached as a humble disciple presents himself to a Guru.”

Regardless of holding immense wealth, there was something else that he sought to attain. The *Upaniṣad* also proves to Śaunaka’s modesty. Being able to humbly approach Aṅgiras as a young disciple would approach a Guru, Śaunaka is depicted as willing to put aside his pride to acquire *brahmavidyā*. The admission or initiation into the fellowship of Parabrahman through *vartamāna* has another significant benefit that now the surrendered one need not fear any harassment from malevolent spirits, the malefic influence of stars and deities of lower order. He has come under the protective umbrella of the Supreme Parabrahmanhead, who controls all, rules over all, and is the redeemer of all. Subsequently, the devotee leads his spiritual life audaciously under the nurture and shelter of Parabrahman. His *vāsanās* (latent desires/inclinations of past) shall get consumed and his causal body (*kāraṇa-śarira*) shall wear away only through accurate knowledge and perfect obedience, for he has sought refuge in Parabrahman. Therefore, he enjoys the privilege of freeing himself forever, which otherwise is not available to careless and motiveless *jīvas*. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, the present Guru Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja has given the *vartamāna mantra* for all the householders and renunciates:

धन्योस्मि पूर्णकामोस्मि निष्पापो निर्भयः सुखी ।

अक्षरगुरुर्योगेन स्वामिनारायणाश्रयात् ॥ 19³⁸⁹

³⁸⁹ Mahant swami Maharaj, *Satsangdiksha*, *Svāminārāyaṇa Aksharpith*, Ahmedabad, 2020

“I am fortunate, fulfilled, sinless, fearless and happy because I have taken the refuge of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa through the Akṣarabrahman Guru.” An aspirant who has surrendered himself to Parabrahman with complete faith and commitment knows that as a finite, limited being, all his efforts and endeavors are deficient and incomplete. They are not totally efficacious and sufficient, and hence, with persistence, he keeps his reverent efforts continuous- like an enthusiast child endeavoring to reach for a fruit on a tree by constant high hops and jumps. A kind-hearted elderly man sees it; he comes to the rescue of a child and gets it. Equally, Parabrahman seeing the efforts of his devotee, takes mercy on him and, holding his hand, He elevates him, liberates him.

In quest of shelter and refuge at the feet of Parabrahman as the only liberator from the bondage and transmigration is the exclusive way of attaining ultimate emancipation.³⁹⁰ Benefaction from Parabrahman entails the growth of all other means (including *ekāntika-dharma*) of the highest accomplishment. Refuge at the feet of Parabrahman takes care of the devotees from great danger. The devotees are reliant on Him, who takes care of the rise and effervescence of *dharma* (dutifulness), *jñāna* (knowledge) *vairāgya* (detachment) and *bhakti* (devotion) in their heart.³⁹¹ In devotee’s heart, resolved Parabrahman’s knowledge rests in the act of seeking refuge at the feet of Parabrahman as my only shelter, protector, supporter and liberator. Such an *āśraya* or refuge is possible when the currently manifest (*pragaṭa*) Parabrahman’s true transcendental form is resolutely known.³⁹² When the devotee is well-anchored with Parabrahman as the surrendered-servant, he, through right efforts, can assuredly win the grace of Parabrahman and attain final emancipation; which otherwise remains an ideal which is simply unattainable. It is noteworthy that when ‘*āśraya*’ i.e., ‘shelter or refuge’ is inscribed as the sole or

³⁹⁰ BG 9/22, Vac. Gadh. 2/13

³⁹¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/66

³⁹² Vac. Panch. 2

exclusive means, there is no intention to deny or undermine the value and importance of other means such as duty, morality, knowledge, renunciation, devotion etc. It is eulogized to the highest position simply because it can bring forth all of them.³⁹³

6.3 Is *Āśrayagrahan* Important?

Svāminārāyaṇa shows a straightforward way to tread on and attain the ultimate spiritual goal. He states: “Hence, there is no other obstacle-free way like that of having the firm refuge of Parabrahman Nārāyaṇa.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/13, p.422) By these words, we can realize that the firm refuge of Parabrahman is a crucial factor as far as the ultimate spiritual goal is concerned. Bhadreśadāsa also explains this factor while commenting on the MU: “तथा चैतादृश गुरुम् एवाभिगच्छेद् विधिवत्तत्त्वरणं गृहीयादित्यर्थः एवाकरश्च नैकार्थज्ञापकः प्रथमं ब्रह्मविद्याप्राप्त्यर्थं गुरुपसत्तौ नियमविधिं ज्ञापयति ब्रह्मविद्याभीप्सा चेद् गुरुः अवश्यमेवाश्रायणीय इति” (MUSB 1/2/12, p.255) “One should only (*eva*) take the refuge of such a Guru. The term only here has many implications. First, it implies that association with such a Guru is necessary to attain *brahmavidyā*. Therefore, all those who desire to attain *brahmavidyā* must take the refuge of such a Guru.” Bhadreśadāsa explains further that the *Upaniṣad* also disapproves seeking refuge under liberated selves like *muktas* or *muktātmas*, who have attained *brahmabhāva* through the association of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. Since the *muktas* are not Akṣarabrahman, they cannot enlighten others-or have others realize *brahmavidyā*. This is also mentioned by Svāminārāyaṇa.³⁹⁴

As Svāminārāyaṇa mentioned earlier that the time of death is very critical and dangerous, in that condition, the only ray of hope is the firm refuge of Parabrahman or the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.³⁹⁵ Now the question arises that if refuge is inevitable,

³⁹³ Vac. Gadh. 2/66

³⁹⁴ Vac. Var. 3

³⁹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/61

then what are the attitudes, preparations, and qualifications required of a refugee (an aspirant) who surrenders to Parabrahman. One who seeks refuge at the feet of Parabrahman and affiliates himself with Parabrahman has to remember that: Parabrahman is the only substratum, liberator, and redeemer.³⁹⁶

1. Even if the suffering is as great as the total tragedy of the whole world befallen, there should be a conviction that no one can protect except my Parabrahman, who is the only protector.³⁹⁷
2. Whatever I desire or expect, I should ask it from none other than my Parabrahman.³⁹⁸
3. I should give up all my unpleasant habits and tendencies and should wholeheartedly change my nature to please Parabrahman, I should eliminate the vices and refill my life with virtues and moralities to please Him.³⁹⁹
4. I should live completely in tune with the will of Parabrahman and never wander away from His will and word.
5. I should give up all my rigidness and decisions now and live life according to His wish.⁴⁰⁰
6. I should remain without a doubt; for now, I do not have any fear of getting lost into Indra-loka (svarga), Brahmaloka or any other celestial region on the way to attaining *paramapada*. I now am sure of my final accomplishment by the grace of Parabrahman. I have resolutely known that there is nothing more blissful and blessed than my Parabrahman, who will bless me with the ultimate happiness.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁶ Vac. Loya 3, Loya 1

³⁹⁷ Vac. Gadh. 3/28

³⁹⁸ Vac. Var. 5

³⁹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/24

⁴⁰⁰ SV 1/165

⁴⁰¹ Vac. Gadh. 3/7

7. Upāsanā

The Sanskrit word *Upāsanā* is a compound of two words: *upa* – meaning near; and *āsanam* – meaning to sit. Thus, *upāsanā* is how an aspirant endeavors spiritually to forever reserve a seat near Parabrahman. More specifically, it is one’s way of worshipping Parabrahman, the mode in which one offers devotion to Him. Bhadreśadāsa provides a simple definition of *upāsanā*: भगवदुपासनं भक्तिविशेषरूपम् तद्वि समाहात्म्यं परमानुचिन्तनविशेषरूपम् ।⁴⁰² “*Upāsanā* is a type of devotion. In this devotion, there is constant remembrance of Parabrahman with the glory of Him.” Thus, *upāsanā* means ‘*upāsanam* syād *dhruvānuSmṛtirdarśanānirvacannacca*,’ i.e., “Scriptures proclaim the importance of the word *upāsanā* as constant, incessant remembrance of the Lord.” ‘*Vedanamupāsanām* syād *tadvisaya śravaṇāt*’ i.e. “*Upāsanā* also means knowledge of Parabrahman: The Highest Reality, because *śrutis* also state so clearly. Here, the word ‘*upāsanā*’ implies knowledge because *śrutis* use it in the sense of knowledge. ‘*tailadhārāvat avicchinnā smṛti*’ is described as *dhyāna*, i.e., ceaseless meditation-contemplation. And on the attainment of the (*smṛtilambhe sārve granthinām vipramokṣa*) stage of constant remembrance of Parabrahman, all the self-entangling knots (*granthi*) perishes, and the self attains emancipation. Here, ‘*smṛti*’ (thinking-remembrance) is equated with ‘*darśana*’ because the *Śruti* says; ‘*ātmā vā* are *dṛṣṭavya śrotavya* and *nididhyāsavya* be seen, heard and meditated upon. When mind exceedingly keeps remembering Parabrahman with the perfect intensity of love (*Bhāvanāprakarṣaṇa*), it culminates into direct vision realization (*darśana*) of Him.⁴⁰³

According to Svāminārāyaṇa: “Many people become great *yogis*, many become realized omniscient and many become deities, and thus attain countless types of greatness, including the supreme state of enlightenment. All this is acquired through the force of the *upāsanā* of Parabrahman. Without *upāsanā* though, nothing can be

⁴⁰² SSS p.351

⁴⁰³ BU 2/4/5

accomplished.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/56, pp.133-134) In this way, all spiritual significance and the accomplishment of the supreme goal (namely-paramapada) are attainable through firmness in *upāsanā*. No spiritual advancement is possible without firm standing in *upāsanā*, whether a man has realized self-knowledge (*ātmaniṣṭhā*) or not, death (and cycles of birth and death) cannot be overcome without absorbing the essence of *upāsanā*. Besides, self-realization (*ātmadarśan*) and brahman-realization are unattainable without the commitment to the *upāsanā* of Parabrahman. Thus, there should not be any omission in *upāsanā*.

The reward of *upāsanā* cannot be gained by a mere stock of merits, nor by rigorous efforts solely, and not even by mere learning and meditation, but by the redemptive mercy of Parabrahman, the supreme protector (*rakṣaka*) and liberator (*tāraka*). *Upāsanā* suggests the devotional worship born of conviction and knowledge of His perfect personality and ultimate glory. Thus, *upāsanā* has the utmost worth in the path of spirituality. *Upāsanā* means cognitive devotion to Parabrahman, who is eternally divine and with a form. Bhadreśadāsa discloses the contains of *upāsanā*:

सर्वकर्ता समुत्कृष्टः साकृतिः प्रकटः सदा।

इत्यादिगुरुलब्धा धीर्ज्ञेया हरेरुपासना॥⁴⁰⁴

Thus, the term ‘*upāsanā*’ encompasses the following:

- Parabrahman is all doer and uppermost entity;
- Firm faith and conviction that Parabrahman eternally has a form, and He is the only substratum and shelter to seek refuge;
- Metaphysical knowledge of Parabrahman’s essential nature at the same time with the knowledge of essential nature of Akṣarabrahman;
- Proper knowledge of Parabrahman's transcendental glory, divinity, and superiority; Parabrahman always manifests on earth through the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.

⁴⁰⁴ SSSK 412

- Refuge at His feet with one-pointed ardent devotion (*ekāntiki-bhakti*) unto Him, with the resolute apprehending (*niścaya*) that He alone is my supreme guard, protector, liberator, mentor and the consolation of myself in this life and after-life (i.e., in life eternal).
- This understanding is attained through the immense grace of the Guru.

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, *upāsanā* consists in realizing with a firm conviction that, Parabrahman is the divine Lord, always possesses a form. He can never be conceived as a formless and impersonal being. He is the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the countless number of universes (*brahmāndas*). He eternally dwells in His highest abode, and as the manifest (incarnate) Parabrahman, becomes perceptibly visible to the devotees on earth through His divine descent.⁴⁰⁵ Parabrahman can never be considered as a mere infinite mass of worship or realization. For us, It is indeed tough to make Him an object of worship or realization, but through the immense grace of the Guru, *upāsanā* becomes fruitful.

The Bhāṣyakāra reveals: “स्वात्मब्रह्मैक्येन यदुपासनबलाद् उपासकोपि... कल्याणमयगुणयोगं भजते” (BSSB 3/2/25, p.301) “Through the oneness with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, a seeker (aspirant) can attain the liberative qualities.” When a person is committed to the *upāsanā* with form (*sadāsākāra*), Parabrahman is never realized, appealed or satiated as the experience just a mass of light to Him, (the formless light of consciousness). If He sees only light in his meditation as a first step of realization, he feels extremely sorrow at his failure to visualize the beautiful form of Parabrahman. Only when he visualizes beyond this light the all satiating most beautiful form of Parabrahman, he feels exceptionally blissful and fulfilled.⁴⁰⁶ For an aspirant, if *upāsanā* is unchangeable, he does not engage himself in the devotion

⁴⁰⁵ Vac. Gadh. 3/35

⁴⁰⁶ Vac. Loya 14

to a deity of lower order. He cannot circumvent or neglect his duties (*dharma*) and cannot give up his servitude (*sevākabhāva/dāsabhāva*) to Parabrahman.⁴⁰⁷

Though a long term *sāadhanā* (spiritual endeavor) of a seeker on one's *ātman* or on impersonal (*nirakaar* Brahman) may be, it is of no avail, for it does not carry anywhere beyond the merger in the formless *cidākāśa* form (aspect) of Akṣarabrahman. It does not empower one to acquire similitude with the formful Akṣarabrahman to eternally serve Parabrahman-Puruṣottama and enjoy His ultimate bliss. Thus, the *upāsanā* (knowledge-cum-worship) of Parabrahman as the supreme Parabrahman is the prima facie requirement for the highest achievement and accomplishment. According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, *upāsanā-bhakti* is a perfect blend of devotion and intellect. Love and knowledge are amalgamated together to engage both the heart and head in the service of Parabrahman. It is neither mere sentimentalism, nor mere emotionalism, nor even dry intellectualism. It is a consequence of reflective study and metaphysical knowledge and *triguṇātīta* *ātmic* love. He persists in the purity of conduct and moral perfection from a devotee of Parabrahman. He incorporates moral, philosophical, religious, emotional, and aesthetic aspects of devotion in his conception of *upāsanā*.⁴⁰⁸ *Svāminārāyaṇa*, in *Vac. Gadh.* 2/27 hints that the path of excessive self-restraint is dry, puritanical, and *upāsanā*-corrosive. Thus, asceticism is diluted and made it practicable to protect, promote and perpetuate the '*Upāsanā*' through upbringing mandirs, installing murtis therein, and promulgating the *bhakti*-rituals.

7.1 The meaning of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Upāsanā*

The Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Upāsanā* is not the *upāsanā* of two separate entities, Akṣara and Puruṣottama. However, it means to become *akṣararūpa* and worship Puruṣottama; that is, to become *brahmarūpa* and offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman.

⁴⁰⁷ *Vac. Gadh.* 2/3, 2/19, 2/27

⁴⁰⁸ BSSB 1/1/2,3; pp.12-18

The principle meaning of *upāsanā* is to understand Parabrahman as the all-doer, supreme, with a form and manifest, as clearly explained by Svāminārāyaṇa in *Vacanāmṛtas*, Panchālā 7, Gadhadā 1/40, Gadhadā 3/35 and others. The powers of Akṣarabrahman and the other entities with Akṣarabrahman are entirely dependent on Parabrahman, and so, clearly, there is no question of offering *upāsanā* to them. After the manifest form of Parabrahman returns to his divine abode, the *mumukṣu* (seeker or aspirant) who associates with the manifest Guru still offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman only. Since Paramātmā himself is fully present through the form of the manifest *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.

Even Akṣara offers *upāsanā* towards Parabrahman. Bhadreśādāsa explains it in the BS commentary: “उपास्यपरमोपासकभावलक्षणः संबन्धो वाच्यः । शास्त्राणि हि निष्ठम्, अत्रैतत्समर्पितं, मत्परः इत्यादिभिः अक्षरब्रह्मणो नित्यं परमात्मपरमोपासनपरायणतां दर्शयन्ति” - “The relation between Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman is like *upāsya* (to whom *upāsanā* is offered) and *upāsaka* (one who offers *upāsanā*). The scriptural statements like *niṣṭham* (MU 1/2/12), *atraitatsamarpitam* (MU 2/1/1), *matparaḥ* (BG 2/61) etc., elaborate this fact.” In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, when a seeker develops such *upāsanā* (devotion coupled with the knowledge of Parabrahman) in the heart, holds that Parabrahman with the definite form, present now (in the incarnate form) together with His devotees exist in eternity also after the total dissolution (*ātyantika-pralaya*) of everything. In short, Parabrahman, devotees, and His all entourage are always with a definite personal form (*sadāsākāra*) and are uneclipsed by the sweeping floods of ultimate dissolution (*ātyantika pralaya*).

In *upāsanā*, love-devotion, faith-knowledge, conviction-commitment, and dedication are all amalgamated together. *Upāsanā* or *dhyāna* consists of constant reflection over the glory of Parabrahman together with intense devotion, love, and concentration. There is ever-growing mutuality between love and devotion on one hand and knowledge and understanding on the other hand. They nourish and

multiply one another. *Bhakti* is living love for Parabrahman and self-absorbing devotion unto Him. When *bhakti* matures to the acme of magnitude and secures the depth of oceanic unfathomability, it becomes illuminating like accurate knowledge. In simple words, *upāsanā* entails in having the resolute knowledge of the supremely venerable (*upāśya*) Parabrahman's essential nature as *sadā-sākāra* (always endowed with a form), *sarva-avatārāṇām-avatārī* (transcendental supreme Lord of lords) and with such a firmly rooted conviction in the heart, engaging oneself in the meditation, contemplation, name-recitation and singing glory of His *leela* (actions, incidents, and exploits).⁴⁰⁹

Conversely, this '*upāsanā*' rejects to accept Parabrahman as a formless-qualityless-attributeless abstract personality. To express Parabrahman as formless (*nirguṇa-nirākāra*) is to rebuke His power, sovereignty, and absoluteness. It is an act of ignoring Parabrahman's splendor, and veracity, and existence. It is '*svarūpadroha*' (spitting his form) of Parabrahman, an act of committing the unpardonable sin of blasphemy.⁴¹⁰ The right knowledge of the nature of Parabrahman consists in realizing Him as an eternally perfect personality having a divine form and an infinite number of infinitely auspicious qualities. The entire *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta is roaming around the *upāsanā* principle, in which one has to realize that to become identical (analogous/similar) to Akṣarabrahman (the supreme devotee) and worship the supreme Parabrahman with the relationship of dedicated-devoted servant to His Master (Parabrahman), is the core aspect of *upāsanā*.⁴¹¹

In this manner, when death, which is like an ocean, is to be overcome, it needs the help of unwavering devotion and dedication (i.e., *upāsanā*) to Parabrahman even for a devotee who may have developed *ātmaniṣṭhā* (self-knowledge/self-

⁴⁰⁹ Vac. Gadh. 2/9

⁴¹⁰ Vac. Var. 2

⁴¹¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/3, Kar. 10

realization). One, thus, should profoundly learn and tread the path of *upāsanā*. This reflects that *upāsanā* ought to be resolutely deep-rooted in the mind because it is not *ātmaniṣṭhā*, but the submission at the feet of the all protector-redeemer Parabrahman alone that comes to the rescue of a *upāsaka* (devotee) at the time of death. Therefore, *upāsanā* is like a life-saving ship in the binding condition of *jivātman* in *saṃsāra*. This is the reason why, even for a totally surrendered-one, the *upāsanā* of the transcendental Parabrahman, singing His splendor, actions, and incidents of His life and chanting His name are vital for the supreme liberation.⁴¹²

7.2 What to Understand in *Upāsanā*

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, the terms 'Svāmi' and 'Nārāyaṇa' found within the *Svāminārāyaṇa mantra* refer to Akṣara and Puruṣottama, respectively. We will now learn the incarnate forms of Svāmi and Nārāyaṇa, otherwise as Akṣara and Puruṣottama, according to the preaching of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Gurus.

7.2.1 *Guṇātītānanda is Akṣarabrahman*

“Mūlajī Bhakta is the incarnation of my divine abode, Akṣaradhāma.”⁴¹³ Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa himself disclosed Guṇātītānanda Svāmi’s true identity through these immortal words. The ‘Akṣara’ of 'Akṣara-Puruṣottama' and 'Svāmi' of ‘*Svāminārāyaṇa*’ both refer to Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmi Mahārāja. This is well-known within the *Sampradāy*. Guṇātītānanda Svāmi Mahārāja was born on 28 September 1784 CE (Aso sud 15, *Samvata* 1841), the auspicious day of *Śarada pūrṇimā*, in the village of Bhādarā, Gujarat. He was named Mūlajī Śarmā. His mother's name was Sākarabā and his father's name was Bholānātha. Śrīhari Sahajānanda (Bhagavāna Svāminārāyaṇa) performed a grand

⁴¹² Vac. Gadh. 1/61

⁴¹³ Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmi: Life and Work, Part 1, p.54

yajna in Dabhāṇa on 20 January 1810 CE (Posh sud 15. Samvat 1866 and initiated Mūlajī Śarmā as a *sadhu*, naming him Guṇātītānanda Svāmi.

Sahajānanda nda Śrīhari is Puruṣottama: The term 'Nārāyaṇa' within 'Svāminārāyaṇa' and 'Puruṣottama' in Akṣara-Puruṣottama both refer to Śrīhari Sahajānanda, who is known as Bhagavāna Svāminārāyaṇa. This identification is extremely verified within the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana*. Within this *Darśana* only Śrīhari Sahajānanda is Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa. *Bhakti* is offered to him with the understanding that He is the Supreme Being, the all-doer, the cause and controller of all, and the granter of ultimate liberation.

7.2.2 *Puruṣottama's Self Revelation*

There is no superior authentication than Puruṣottama Bhagavān himself unpacking His own identity. Bhagavāna Svāminārāyaṇa repeatedly uncovers the above principle in his preachings. For example : “It is that same supreme Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavāna who manifests on this earth out of kindness - for the purpose of bestowing liberation to the *jīvas*. He is presently visible before everyone; He is your *Iṣṭadeva*; and is accepting your service.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/38, p.664) Thus, in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta, the Akṣara Puruṣottama *upāsanā* is the most powerful spiritual endeavor.⁴¹⁴

8. Physical *Sāadhanā*

After hearing that there is so much weightage put on *brahmabhāva* and *brahmavidyā* in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, someone might claim that there is no need for physical endeavors such as *kartvya karma*, *niyamas*, *sevā*, austerities etc. in this tradition, but Svāminārāyaṇa has given a unique and perfect balanced path of spiritual endeavors. In the *Vacanāmṛta*, Svāminārāyaṇa magnified

⁴¹⁴ SV 2/2

svarūpaniṣṭhā,⁴¹⁵ *Upāsanā*,⁴¹⁶ knowledge,⁴¹⁷ *brahmavidyā*,⁴¹⁸ *brahmabhāva*⁴¹⁹ but at the same time, he advocated austerities,⁴²⁰ *sevā*,⁴²¹ *niyamas*,⁴²² studying of scriptures,⁴²³ constant effort⁴²⁴, etc. Bhadrēśadāsa also elaborates this fact in his commentary: “यथा अश्वो देशान्तरगमनसाधनभूतोपि तद्गमनाकूलसामग्रीकलापमपेक्षते तथैव परलोकसाधनभूतापि ब्रह्मविद्या गार्हस्थ्यनिबन्धनाग्निहोत्रादिकर्मापक्षते। अतो ब्रह्मविद्यानिष्ठैरपि गृहिभिर्नित्यनैमित्तिकादिसर्वकर्मानुष्ठानं न परिहीयत इति सूचितार्थः ।” (BSSB 3/4/26, p.369) “A person who wants to travel far to reach the other region uses a horse. The horse is an essential means to reach there; However, additionally, he takes other stuff like food, water, etc., with him for his convenience. In this manner, *brahmavidyā* is a prominent means to attain liberation, yet, other *karmas* are also essential to accompany it. Even the *brahmarūpa* devotees must involve themselves in *nitya* and *naimittika karmas*.” Moreover, a devotee should abjure the *niṣiddha karma* (prohibited deeds). Bhadrēśadāsa warns: “तस्माद् ब्रह्मणः सुरां न पिबति पाप्मना नोत्सृजा इति इति । पापभिया ब्राह्मणः सुरापानं न कुरुत इति भावः।”(BSSB 3/4/31, p. 371) “Devotees of Parabrahman do not drink wine considering it as a sinful act. Thus, devotees should not have liquor.” Along with this, a devotee must keep his diet pure in order to remain firm on the path of spiritual endeavor. The CU states:

आहारशुद्धौ सत्त्वशुद्धौ ध्रुवा स्मृतिः

स्मृतिलम्भे सर्वग्रन्थीनां विप्रमोक्षः ।⁴²⁵

Bhadrēśadāsa comments: “ब्रह्मरूपेण स्वात्मना परब्रह्मपरमोपसनानुकूलतया अवश्यानुष्ठेयं साधनमाह। आहारशुद्धौ चक्षुरादिसकलेन्द्रियाणां तत्तद्विषयग्रहणरूपाहारस्य शुद्धौ सत्यां सत्त्वशुद्धिः सत्त्वाख्यान्तः करणस्य तदुपलक्षितस्य चात्मनः शुद्धिर्भवति” (CUSB 7/26/2, p.340) “When the inputs of *indriyas* have been purified, the *ātman* becomes purified. When the *ātman* has been purified, the memory

⁴¹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/9

⁴¹⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/56

⁴¹⁷ Vac. Loya. 7

⁴¹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/3

⁴¹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/27

⁴²⁰ Vac. Kar. 10

⁴²¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

⁴²² Vac. Jet. 5

⁴²³ Vac. Gadh. 3/1

⁴²⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

⁴²⁵ CU 7/26/2

becomes firm. And when the memory (of the Highest Self) remains firm, then all the ties (which bind us from *māyā*) are loosened.”

The BG shows the way how to control our diet habits in order to become a *yogi*.

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।

युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥⁴²⁶

“The *yoga* destroys all sorrow for the one who is moderate and vigilant in eating, recreation, working, sleeping, and waking.”

यज्ञदानतपःकर्म न त्याज्यं कार्यमेव तत् ।

यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम् ॥⁴²⁷

“Acts of sacrifice, charity, and sense-control should not be abandoned, but should be performed, because sacrifice, charity, and discipline purify our mind.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments: यज्ञादीनि एतानि परमात्मप्रसन्नताहेतुकानि सत्कर्माणि इति यावद् मनीषिणां मतिमतां पावनानि बाह्यान्तःकरणपरिशुद्धिकराणि” (BGSB 18/5, pp.341-342) “If the acts of sacrifice, charity, and sense-control are accomplished to please Parabrahman, then, the seeker’s inner faculties become pure.” When one accepts the *vartamāna mantra* from the Guru, he has to follow certain rules and regulations, codes, and conducts according to one’s *āśrama*. Though in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, there is no discrimination according to one’s caste, creed, culture, color or gender but *Svāminārāyaṇa* insisted that a devotee must follow the rules given by the scriptures, Guru, and the state where he or she lives. This physical *sādhana* ultimately leads him to liberation.⁴²⁸

8.1 Niyamas

Niyamas are mostly known as *dharma*. To attain ultimate liberation, an aspirant has to follow the codes of conduct of the *Satsaṅga* fellowship. They are included in the devotees’ daily behavior. *Niyamas* are essential for making our daily deeds or

⁴²⁶ BG 6/17

⁴²⁷ BG 18/5

⁴²⁸ Mahant swami Maharaj, *Satsaṅgiksha* - 12-17, *Svāminārāyaṇa* Aksharpith, Ahmedabad, 2020

actions pious and pure that is called *sadācāra*. Actually, *sadācāra* is asserted in the scriptures by ṛṣis. *Sadācāra* is called *dharma* as well. Even bhakti without dharma is unacceptable in the tradition. For a spiritual aspirant, observance of *dharma* is very important in order to attain liberation.⁴²⁹ However, *niyamas* are concerned with *bāhya āchār* (external behavior). They help us to lift our personal pious behavior (*sadācāra*), consequently *dharma* becomes firm. Generally, *niyamas* and *dharma* are connected to each other. Collectively, they are called ‘*niyamadharma*’ in a pragmatic way. Since the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya* is known as a *śuddha sampradāya*⁴³⁰ (pure fellowship) because of its pious codes in every aspect of life. Svāminārāyaṇa states the importance of *niyamas* in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “Whether or not one has *vairāgya*, if one diligently observes the *niyamas* prescribed by Parabrahman, then the desires for the *pañcaviśayas* can be conquered.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/16, p.429)

Niyamas are related to *indriyas* and their respective subject of pleasures. In order to satisfy one’s physical or mental urge, one engrosses in the *pañcaviśayas*. So, if there are no rules and regulations or codes of conduct regulating the indulgence of *viśayas*, then the *jīva* falls from the path of liberation and suffers miseries in its own daily life as well. That is why Svāminārāyaṇa states: “Keep the behaviors of your five senses (*indriyas*) extremely pure.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/18, p.57). Svāminārāyaṇa strongly opposes those who believe that knowledge is everything to achieve a spiritual goal and it is ok if there is a lapse in observing *niyamas*: “From today onwards, then, whosoever abandons *dharma* – in the form of the five religious and *sāmpradāyika* vows – solely advocating the potency of *bhakti* or *jñāna*, is a blasphemer of the Guru and Guru’s word.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/77, p.191) Svāminārāyaṇa likes those who are firm in observing the non-lust vow: “In fact, the

⁴²⁹ Mahant swami Maharaj, Satsangdiksha - 117, *Ibid*.

⁴³⁰ Vac. Gadh. 3/3

very cause that I have resided here is because of these devotees' firm resolve to observe the vow of non-lust." (Vac. Gadh. 2/33, p.465) The ancient scriptures also advocate the glory of norms and regulations of the religion, which was the way of life. The TU reveals:

वेदमनूच्याचार्योन्तेवासिनमनुशास्ति ।
सत्यं वद । धर्मं चर । स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः ।
आचार्याय प्रियं धनमाहत्य प्रजातन्तुं मा व्यवच्छेत्सीः ।
सत्यान् प्रमदितव्यम् । धर्मान् प्रमदितव्यम् ।
कुशलान् प्रमदितव्यम् । भूतै न प्रमदितव्यम् ।
स्वाध्यायप्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् ॥⁴³¹

“After teaching the Vedas, in the end, the teacher instructs the pupil. Speak the truth. Accomplish your duty. Do not abandon the self-study of the Vedas. After giving the gift desired by the teacher, do not break the chain of your progeny. Do not abandon truth. Do not abandon duty. Do not abandon your health. Do not abandon your material wellbeing. Do not abandon the self-study and the teaching of the Vedas.”

देवपितृकार्याभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् । मातृदेवो भव ।
पितृदेवो भव । आचार्यदेवो भव । अतिथिदेवो भव ।
यान्यनवद्यानि कर्माणि । तानि सेवितव्यानि । नो इतराणि ।
यान्यस्माकं सुचरितानि । तानि त्वयोपास्यानि ॥⁴³²

“Do not neglect your duties to deities and ancestors. May your mother be honored as a deity by you; may your father be honored as a deity by you; may your teacher be honored as a deity by you; may your guest be honored as a Parabrahman by you. Whatever actions are free from vanity, they should be practiced, not others. Whatever good behavior you find among us (teachers), that alone should be practiced, not others.”

⁴³¹ TU 1/11/1

⁴³² TU 1/11/2

Bhadreśadāsa comments: “कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतं समाः इत्यादिवदत्रापि आवश्यककर्तव्यानि कर्माणि उपदिश्यन्ते... ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुपदिष्टश्रुतिस्मृति प्रतिपादितसदाचारं परिपालय।(TUSB 1/11/1, pp.353-354) “*Īśopaniṣad* declares, one should indulge in the *karmas* and live for hundred years in this world. In the same way, the TU sings the glory of the daily behavior of a disciple. (so) Follow the rules and regulation asserted by the scriptures and preached by the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru.”

8.2 *Sevā*

“सेवाधर्मो परमगहनो योगिनामपि अगम्यः”

“To perform seva is indeed very difficult for yogis also.” In every religion of the world, *sevā* (service) is accepted as an active part of religion and spirituality. Though, it is very difficult to accomplish it in the manner through which it becomes the means to attain ultimate liberation. That is why it is called difficult even for *yogis*. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of Vedanta, *sevā* is a glorious spiritual means that can please the Guru and *Hari*. *Svāminārāyaṇa* highlights the benefit of *sevā* in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “If the *vruttis* of the *indriyas* are engaged in the service of Parabrahman Bhagwān and His utmost devotee, then the *antaḥkaraṇa* is purified and the sins that have been attached to the *jīva* since time immemorial are eliminated.”(Vac. Gadh. 1/8, p.37)

Sevā is not just a matter of debate or proverb which finds its place in the scriptures only. *Svāminārāyaṇa* gives a live example of a devotee who had achieved the highest peak of *sevā*. He states: “Just as Ukā Khāchar has become passionate to serving the *sādhus*, in the same manner, if one becomes passionate to serving Parabrahman and His *Santa* to the extent that one would not be able to stay for even a moment without serving them, then all of the malign desires in one's *antaḥkaraṇa* will be destroyed.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/25, pp. 449-450) The BG also speaks the glory of *sevā* in the fourth chapter. “Acquire this knowledge from a

Parabrahman-realized master by humble respect, by sincere inquiry, and by service. The wise who have realized the truth will teach you.”⁴³³

Bhadreśadāsa comments on ‘by service’: “सेवया प्रकटपरमात्मभवप्रकर्षविभूषितया दिव्यभावयुक्ताभि-
स्नेहशीलया शुश्रूषया” (BGSB 4/34, p.109) “A devotee when serves another devotee with
the understanding that this devotee is associated with the manifest form of
Parabrahman. This understanding brings the super quality in *sevā*.” In the field of
sevā, a great example is of Satyakāma Jābālī. In his childhood, he wanted to go to
a *Gurukula* and study the scriptures in order to become a great scholar. He took the
permission of his mother and walked straight to the Guru, Gautama R̥ṣi. After
noticing his innocence, the Guru accepted him as his disciple. Satyakāma was very
happy. He wanted to fulfill his wish to study the scriptures and attain knowledge.
But to his astounding, the Guru said:

तं होवाच नैतदब्राह्मणो विवक्तुमर्हति समिधं
सोम्याहरोप त्वा नेष्ये न सत्यादगा इति तमुपनीय
कृशानामबलानां चतुःशता गा निराकृत्योवाचेमाः
सोम्यानुसंभ्रजेति ता अभिप्रस्थापयन्नुवाच

नासहस्रेणावर्तेयेति स ह वर्षगणं प्रोवास ता यदा सहस्रं सम्पेदुः ॥⁴³⁴

“Having initiated him, he chose four hundred lean and weak cows, and said: ‘Tend these, dear.’ He drove them out and said to himself, ‘I shall not return unless I bring back a thousand.’ He stayed a number of years in the forest, untill the cows had become a thousand.” Satyakāma was a firm disciple. He did *sevā* of the cows as per his Guru’s wish. After obeying the Guru’s command with perfection, he returned to *Gurukula*. His face was shining due to *brahmabhāva*. The Guru observed it in first glance. He said:

⁴³³ BG 4/34

⁴³⁴ CU 4/4/5

ब्रह्मविदिव वै सोम्य भासि को नु त्वानुशशासेत्यन्ये

मनुष्येभ्य इति ह प्रतिजज्ञे भगवान् स्त्वेव मे कामे ब्रूयात्॥⁴³⁵

“The Guru said: ‘dear, you shine like one who knows Brahman. Who then has taught you?’ He replied: ‘Not anyone. But you only, Sir, I wish, should teach me’”
श्रुतं ह्येव मे भगवद्दृशेभ्य आचार्याद्धैव विद्या विदिता, साधिष्ठं प्रापतीति तस्मै हैतदेवोवाचात्र ह न किंचन, वीयायेति वीयायेति ॥⁴³⁶
“Satyakāma said, ‘For I have heard from men like you, Sir, that only knowledge which is learned from a teacher (*ācārya*) leads to really good.’ Then he taught him the same knowledge.” In this manner, *sevā* captures a sublime place amongst the spiritual endeavors. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, *sevā* becomes a part of life. The devotees serve other devotees with understanding their glory.⁴³⁷ Svāminārāyaṇa himself declares: “Therefore, in order to please Parabrahman, I desire only to serve devotees of Parabrahman in this life and all subsequent lives. Furthermore, just as this is my resolution, all of you should also make the same resolution.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/28, p.456)

8.3 Austerities

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, *tapa* (austerities) plays a major role as far as the physical-spiritual endeavors are concerned. Svāminārāyaṇa explicitly states: “To please Parabrahman, Nārādji accomplished stringent austerities by tolerating cold and heat, hunger and thirst for many *yugas*; and due to this, he was able to please Parabrahman. In the same manner, a person who is wise deliberately performs austerities by restraining his body and *indriyas*.”(Vac. Kar. 10, p.270)

Bhadreśadāsa explains the meaning of *tapa*: बाह्यान्तःकरणसंयमनलक्षणं तपः (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)
“A seeker should pacify the power of his internal and external *indriyas* and restrain them from the sense pleasures.” Svāminārāyaṇa also shows the way to control them:

⁴³⁵ CU 4/9/2

⁴³⁶ CU 4/9/3

⁴³⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

“The physical *indriyas* can be regulated by observing the *niyamas* specified for a renunciant in the *dharma-śāstras*; by governing one’s diet; by observing vows like *taptkrucchha chāndrayanā*, etc.; by deliberately enduring cold, heat, hunger, and thirst; by engaging in the discourses, talks, and devotional songs related to Parabrahman; by engrossing in worship and remembrance; by governing one’s posture and by other spiritual endeavors. The *antahkarana* can be controlled by contemplating upon Parabrahman’s greatness, by meditating on Parabrahman and by realizing oneself to be the *ātman*.”(Vac. Loya 5, p.293)

9. *Dikṣā*

Dikṣā is an ancient Indian tradition in which a seeker abides by his own wish to follow some particular rules and regulation described by scriptures and directed by the Guru. There are two types of *dikṣā*. (1). Common (2) Special. The common *dikṣā* is for householders and the special (additional) *dikṣā* is for those who want to remain celibate renunciates throughout their life.⁴³⁸

9.1 *Dikṣita* Housholder’s *Niyamas*

When a seeker takes refuge of the Guru and receives the *vartamāna dikṣā mantra*.⁴³⁹ The Guru gives him five vows to enter the *satsaṅga* fellowship.

व्यभिचारं सुरापानमभक्ष्यमांसभक्षणम् ।

चौर्यञ्च सर्वथा त्यक्तुं सुदृढनिश्चया द्विज ॥

मुमुक्षवस्तु विज्ञेया साधारणाधिकरिणः।⁴⁴⁰

After a firm resolve of abjuring meat-eating, liquor, theft, addictions, and adultery, aspirants are eligible to take common *dikṣā*. Svāminārāyaṇa clearly states: “One who follows the path of unrighteousness is immersed in evil deeds such as stealing, adultery, eating meat, drinking alcohol, changing someone’s caste by force and

⁴³⁸ APM 2/10/27-33

⁴³⁹ *Satsaṅgādikṣha* 18-19

⁴⁴⁰ APM 2/10/38-39

having one's own caste changed by force. Consequently, no one in the world ever trusts him.” (Vac. Sār. 10, p.225)

9.1.1 Meat Eating

One has to kill animals to eat meat. Killing is a grave sin. It must be abjured.⁴⁴¹ Svāminārāyaṇa has recommended performance of only non-violent *yajñas*. “So, one should never eat flesh, even if it is the remnants of offerings in a sacrifice or in circumstances of great difficulty. One should not eat or drink the offerings made to a deity to whom flesh and wine are offered.”⁴⁴² To prevent one from the bad food one should understand, “Even unclean food grains and unsieved flour should not be used, as they are likely to contain small insects which may be killed. So, this should also be avoided.”⁴⁴³ No one should bathe with dirty water, which breeds insects. The *Mahābhārata* declares, “A man who does not take wine and meat is as good as a man who performs the *Aśvamedha Yajña* every month.”⁴⁴⁴

9.1.2 Liquor

Mahanta Svāmi says,

सुराभङ्गातमालादि यद् यद् भवेद्भि मादकम्।

तद् भक्षयेत् पिबेन्नैव धूम्रपानमपि त्यजेत्॥⁴⁴⁵

“One should never consume intoxicating substances, such as alcohol, bhang and tobacco. One should also refrain from smoking.” Drinking liquor arouses *tāmas* (darkness) within. Even if it has been offered to a deity, it should not be taken. The scriptures state that if even a drop of liquor falls on one's shoes, the animal whose skin was utilized for making those shoes goes to hell. “*Manusmṛti* lists wine drinking as one of the five grave sins. One should never take medicines in which

⁴⁴¹ *Satsangdiksha* 29

⁴⁴² APM 4/53/11

⁴⁴³ Vac. Gadh. 1/29, 1/48

⁴⁴⁴ APM 4/53/23-25

⁴⁴⁵ *Satsangdiksha* 27

liquor or meat has been mixed or which are prescribed by a physician whose conduct is not known. Meat-eating and wine drinking are considered a necessity in this modern age. They have been adopted either for making money in business or for promoting a person's social status. But such indulgence is a grave sin.”⁴⁴⁶ *Satsangis* should never take meat or drink alcohol. “Those followers going abroad for the sake of studies or for some other purpose should also strictly observe these rules. Experience confirms that one can live even in a foreign country without taking meat and alcohol, i.e., as a strict vegetarian and teetotaler. So, this rule must not be violated under any temptation of social status, company or material benefit. Observance of this rule holds great importance for obtaining the grace of Parabrahman.”⁴⁴⁷

9.1.3 Theft

An aspirant should never steal. Even for the sake of dharma, one should never commit theft. Even taking fuel, flowers, etc., without the consent of their owners is regarded as theft. Not returning things that are borrowed is also regarded as a form of theft.⁴⁴⁸ “Wealth obtained through fraudulent means does not bring happiness. No one should stealthily enter a house or shop, pass through any field or put up in a place without the owner's permission. Theft, along with drinking liquor, is also considered one of the five grave sins people should not commit. Therefore, none should commit theft in any way.”⁴⁴⁹

9.1.4 Addictions

One should always renounce all harmful addictions, as addictions cause numerous illnesses and miseries.⁴⁵⁰ Intoxicating substances like hashish, morphine, marijuana, opium, tobacco, heroin, etc. should not be taken, drunk or inhaled. They artificially

⁴⁴⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/29, 1/48

⁴⁴⁷ APM 4/53/11, BSSB 3/4/31, p.371

⁴⁴⁸ *Satsangdiksha* 31,32

⁴⁴⁹ APM 4/53/13

⁴⁵⁰ *Satsangdiksha* 26

stimulate the body and mind, thus making man a slave of addictions. Guṇātītānanda Svāmi has said, “The amount wastefully spent by *kusaṅgis* is more than enough to meet the daily needs of a *satsaṅgī*.” Gambling in any form – playing cards, betting on races, speculating, etc. – are also various kinds of vices. “Vulgar films and dramas must not be seen. Addictions increase our greediness and consequently ruin us. Therefore, one should keep away from these vices. However, if by bad company, one is lured into the indulgence of any one of these habits, then it must be eradicated off by *Satsaṅga* and the company of *sādhus*.”⁴⁵¹

9.1.5 Adultery

All women and men should never engage in any form of adultery. One must not commit adultery either by mind, speech or body.⁴⁵² One should not even look at women with an immoral eye. *Brahmacarya* is the greatest virtue and earns the immense blessings of Parabrahman. “In this day and age, when, innumerable vices arise from men and women mix freely with one another and take undue liberty. These incidents ultimately spell moral degeneration for the people involved. Therefore, today, there is a need for the strict practice of this virtue. *Satsaṅgis* should never look lustfully at women with evil thoughts and should abide by the ethical codes given. A householder must limit his intimate relation with his wife only, while the other hand, renunciate has to observe the eight-fold celibacy.”⁴⁵³

9.2 Dikṣita Renunciate’s Niyamas

Mahant Svāmi explains that those who wish to join the *sādhus-ashram* (ascetic-hermitage or monastery) should receive initiation from the Akṣarabrahman Guru. All *sādhus* (monks) should always observe eight-fold *brahmacharya*.⁴⁵⁴ After accepting the advanced level *dikṣā*, a renunciate has to follow some additional codes

⁴⁵¹ APM 4/53/14, Vac. Loya. 8

⁴⁵² *Satsaṅgīdikṣha* 28

⁴⁵³ APM 4/53/14, Vac. Gadh. 1/18, Vac. Gadh. 1/72

⁴⁵⁴ *Satsaṅgīdikṣha* 281

and conducts along with the aforementioned *niyamas*. To affect this, Svāminārāyaṇa gave them five vows, the *pañca-vartmān*. Renunciates are required to follow all these *niyamas* with profound perfection. Bhadreśadāsa consolidates: “उत्सन्नाग्निरनग्निको वा यदहरेव विरजेत् तदहरेव प्रवजेद् इत्यादिश्रुत्यन्तरे विधिप्रत्ययप्रयुक्तभावशब्दश्रवनादनुष्ठेयमेव-पारिव्रज्यमपीत्यर्थः।” (BSSB 3/4/22, p.366)

“A person whether he follows the *Agnihotra Karma* or not, if he feels detachment towards worldly affairs, he should abjure the home and accept the garb of a renunciate. In this *śruti*, the term ‘*virājita*’ and ‘*pravrajita*’ reflects the action. Therefore, the renunciate has to indulge in the actions.” These additional *pañca-vartmān* (*niyamas*) are:

पञ्चैवावश्यजेतव्याः सन्ति दोषेषु तेष्वपि । जितेषु येषु सर्वे ते जिताः स्युर्नात्र संशयः ॥

लोभः कामो रसास्वादः स्नेहो मानश्च पञ्चम । अन्तःशत्रवः एते हि दुर्जया विदुषामपि ॥⁴⁵⁵

“To eradicate the internal spiritual enemies like lust, avarice, attachment, craving for the taste of food and ego, a renunciate has to follow the order of ascetic-monks (*sādhus*). In order to fulfill that purpose, the *śāstra* prescribes five fundamental precepts (*vartamāna*), namely, *niṣkāma* (strict continence), *nirlobha* (non-avarice), *nihsneha* (non-attachment), *nirmāna* (utter humility) and *niḥsvāda* (indifference to food-taste). By following these vows, one can overcome all his internal enemies.” The Svāminārāyaṇa initiated *sādhus* (the ascetics) should live a life of self-refrainment and self-denial, and therefore, they are supposed to give up all sense-fascinations and sense-attachments. They are obliged to live in a society surrounded by people. They have a duty to serve mankind, but with a sense of detachment and constant Parabrahman-consciousness. In the midst of people, they are supposed to enjoy the bliss of Parabrahman with solitude while working for them.

⁴⁵⁵ APM 4/54/11-12

The *sādhus* must be indifferent towards attachment or aversion for anyone. He does not wish ill of anyone in thought, speech, and action. They ought to give back love and goodwill for hatred and attacks hurled on them. They do not hurt any living creature. They should see Parabrahman in all and good in all. Their life of dutifulness ought to consummate in the life dignified. The BG reminds:

प्रजहाति यदा कामान्सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान् ।

आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥⁴⁵⁶

“When one is completely free from all vicious and good desires and is satisfied with his *ātman* by the joy of knowing Parabrahman, then one is called an enlightened person.” In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, it is the attitude and good will that matter most and not the pomp, nor the details of acts and not even the failure or success. He is truly a renunciate, a hermit, an ascetic who has an intense love for Parabrahman alone. On the other hand, he should not have any love or attachment for anything except Parabrahman. Renunciate ascetics do not attend to anything but one's *ātman*. He abandons interest in everything except his *ātman*, and with *ātman*-consciousness he worships Paramātmā.⁴⁵⁷ He is a true recluse-ascetic who once, after renouncing the world, never thinks (desires) anything of it again. The worldly pleasures cannot deviate one whose mind is drowned in Parabrahman-consciousness.⁴⁵⁸

The sadhu worships Parabrahman and at the same time abides by His commands. For no other motives but to please Parabrahman alone.⁴⁵⁹ A true ascetic-*sādhū* (*tyāgi*) ought to have thirty portent virtues of Parabrahman.⁴⁶⁰ The *sādhū* makes an effort to absorb virtues and develops in him by the right resolute knowledge of the essential nature of Parabrahman. A *tyāgi-sādhū* sternly practices continence in all

⁴⁵⁶ BG 2/55

⁴⁵⁷ Vac. Gadh. 1/36, 1/38, 1/44

⁴⁵⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/36, 1/38, Vac. Gadh. 2/23

⁴⁵⁹ Vac. Kar. 10

⁴⁶⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/77, 1/78

genuineness with its eightfold requirements. He practices atonement with great sincerity when the fault occurs. He seldom pays attention to the things of worldly value. He treats them as insignificant objects and is not tempted by them.⁴⁶¹ He remains the lowly servant of the servants (devotees) of Parabrahman. He remains calm composed, and equipoise. Self-abnegation and self-denial constitute the life-style of a *sādhū*. Proper restraint and right thinking are the necessary disciplines for a *sādhū*. Abiding himself by the rules and vows prescribed for ascetic-monks, a *sādhū* should neither crave for nor be allured by the pleasures of the world, as they are valueless.⁴⁶² As far as the *sādhū* of the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition are concerned, they are the brand ambassador of the philosophical knowledge. These *sādhū*s (ascetic monks) have been playing a vital role in enriching and spread this philosophical knowledge around the world.

9.3 Relaxation in the Observance of *Niyamas*

The Svāminārāyaṇa tradition is firm but not inert. For example, on the day of a fast, one has to renounce water and food strictly, but the *śāstras* permit one who is seriously ill to eat on the day of a fast. This indicates that all the religious norms are to help humans, not against them. These relaxations of duties are prescribed by the *śāstra* for absolute emergencies only. This is known as *āpad dharma*. This is the *dharma* allowed in periods of great difficulty. One should never relax in the performance of one's duties in the face of very normal difficulties.⁴⁶³ The *Mahābhārata* instructs, “*Āpad dharma* should be resorted to only in the face of death. Once the calamity has cleared, then one should observe the normal rules of *dharma*.” In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, there is a story of Uśasti Ṛṣi. Uśasti did not get food for many days. He was about to die. On his last breath, he went to a *mahāvat* (elephant rider), who was at that time eating putrefied black lentils and

⁴⁶¹ KeUSB 2/4, pp.46-47

⁴⁶² Vac. Gadh. 1/69

⁴⁶³ APM 4/53/35

asked for some food. The *mahāvat* gave him the half-eaten food from his dish, which Uśasti ate. Subsequently, the *mahāvat* offered him water. Uśasti said, “No, I can stay alive with the black lentils for now. I shall not drink the water from which you have already drunk.” This should be recognized as the appropriate practice of *āpad dharma*. Today, the observance of *dharma* has deteriorated because people have started treating minor problems as *āpad dharma*.⁴⁶⁴

Bhadreśadāsa also comments on the CU: “एवमनेन प्राणात्ययसंकटे सर्वान्नामुमितिरापद्धर्माचरणविवेकश्चोपदिष्टौ” (CUSB 1/10/4, p.53) “Thus, an act of *āpad dharma* is permitted only at the face of death. But it should not be accepted as a routine habit. This wisdom is preached here.” The BS also describes this fact in the form of a *sūtra*: सर्वान्नानुमतिश्च प्राणात्यये तद्दर्शनात्⁴⁶⁵ The Bhāṣyakāra explains that सर्वभक्षणानुज्ञा न सर्वकालिकापि तु प्राणात्यये प्राणसंकटलक्षणापत्काले एव । (BSSB 3/4/28, p.370) “The act of accepting the food which is tasted by another person is permitted only at the face of death.”

9.4 Atonement

We have learned some of the various moral, physical rules prescribed by Svāminārāyaṇa. But he knows the human tendency that knowingly or unknowingly any of these rules would be transgressed, then for purification, rules for atonement are also given in scriptures like the *Satsaṃgadīkṣā* ⁴⁶⁶ and *Akṣarapurūṣottama Māhātmyam*. Similarly, the words of a param ekāntika *sādhu* who has attained Parabrahman-realization are also measured to be *dharma*. Thus, whatever he instructs one to do in atonement for a sin purifies one from that sin, but it should be done with full faith. After having atoned for the sin, the devotee becomes purified. He should not then be known as a sinner.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ CU 1/10/1-4

⁴⁶⁵ BS 3/4/28

⁴⁶⁶ *Satsaṃgadīkṣā* 273

⁴⁶⁷ APM 4/54/57

10. Bhakti (Devotion-Worship)

Bhadreśadāsa declares: “किमपि साधनं भक्तिं विना नैव प्रसिद्ध्यति”⁴⁶⁸ “No endeavor is successful without *bhakti*.” The word ‘*bhakti*’ is derived from the *Sam̐skṛta* root ‘*bhaj*’, meaning to ‘to worship’ ‘to seek refuge’, ‘to serve’, and ‘to love’. Since the word ‘*bhakti*’ suggests the intellectual and emotional act of seeking refuge with love and dedication, the path of *bhakti* is described as the most important means to please Parabrahman.

माहात्म्यज्ञानयुक्स्नेहः सुदृढः सर्वतोधिकः। भक्तिरित्युच्यते मातः शास्त्रेषु परमात्मनि॥⁴⁶⁹

“Intense and centered love towards Parabrahman coupled with the knowledge of his greatness identified as *bhakti* in the scriptures.” Simply, *bhakti* is described as an elite attachment to Parabrahman with intense love.⁴⁷⁰ *Bhakti* consists of constant remembrance of Parabrahman similar to an uninterrupted flow of oil from one vessel into another.⁴⁷¹

Svāminārāyaṇa defines: “*Bhakti*, an intense affection for Parabrahman which is devoid of all desires for fruits, and which is escorted with an understanding of Parabrahman’s magnitude.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/21, p.60) *Bhakti*, assisted by the knowledge of Parabrahman's glory (*māhātmyajñāna*) remains ever blooming both in its intensity and extensity. However, it is *bhakti* only when it is unprovoked and desireless.⁴⁷² Bhadreśadāsa explains:

भक्तिर्नानाविधा प्रोक्ता श्रवणकीर्तनादिका।

भक्ताभिरुचिभेदाद् हि तत्र वैविध्यदर्शनम्॥⁴⁷³

“*Bhakti* (devotion) implies nine-fold forms of worship (*navadhābhakti*); actually, the nine types of differences are due to worshiper’s interest or preferences.” This *bhakti* is described as ‘*sādhana-bhakti*’ i.e. *bhakti* as a means. Prahādājī states:

⁴⁶⁸ SSSK 386

⁴⁶⁹ APM 1/38/2

⁴⁷⁰ Shandilyasūtra 1/2

⁴⁷¹ Nārada bhaktisūtra 1/2

⁴⁷² Vac. Sar. 5

⁴⁷³ SSSK 410

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् ।

अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं सख्यमात्मनिवेदनम् ॥⁴⁷⁴

“Hearing and chanting about the transcendental holy name, form, qualities, actions, and pastimes of Parabrahman, remembering them, serving the lotus feet of Parabrahman, offering Him respectful worship with sixteen types of accessories, offering prayers to Parabrahman, becoming His servant, believing Parabrahman one’s best friend, and submitting everything unto Him (in other words, serving Him by the deed, mind, and speech)—these nine processes are acknowledged as pure devotional service.”

In addition to this, in the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, the Guruparampara explains that beyond this nine-fold form of *bhakti*, there is '*parā-bhakti*,' i.e. 'devotion-par-excellence'. Which is described as '*phala-rupā*' i.e. '*bhakti* as the climax'. It is described as '*prema-lakṣaṇā-bhakti*' in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*,⁴⁷⁵ while as '*ekāntiki-bhakti*' in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School.⁴⁷⁶ This *bhakti* is characterized by complete Parabrahman-oriented intense love and the awareness that he chants 'I am Brahman', “Akṣaram *aham* Puruṣottama *dasosmi*”.⁴⁷⁷ Means my actual form is Akṣara and I am a servant of Parabrahman. It is the highest devotion, love, and servitude unto Parabrahman after transcending the gamut of three *guṇas* of *māyā-prakṛti*. In the BG, ‘अनन्या भक्त्या’ is described where Bhadrēśadāsa defines it as unfaltered *brāhmic* devotion to Parabrahman. Thus, the word '*bhakti*' finds a new dimension in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, for it advocates, *nirguṇa*, *brahmarūpa*, *ātmic prīti* for Parabrahman.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁴ *Śrīmad Bhagavatam* -7/5/23

⁴⁷⁵ *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*-11/3/31-32

⁴⁷⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/21, 3/21

⁴⁷⁷ Satsangdiksha 57

⁴⁷⁸ BGSB 8/22, p.194

10.1 Intense Love Due to Glory

Bhadreśadāsa defines the glory of Parabrahman through which the intense love rises:

भक्तिस्तु सहजानन्दे माहात्म्यज्ञानविभूषिता ।

दिव्यानन्यापरा प्रीतिलौकिकभाववर्जिता ॥⁴⁷⁹

“*Bhakti* towards Parabrahman should be coupled with the glory of Him. This love in the form of *bhakti* should be focused, divine, and without worldly sentiments.” When a seeker has the resolute knowledge (*mahatmyajnāna*) and conviction (*niścaya*) of the glory of Parabrahman, the highest love for Parabrahman arises in which the seeker understands that the currently manifest form of Parabrahman (*pratyakṣa-parāmātmā svarūpa*) is the inner self of all, omnipotent all-doer. There is no other else such as *puruṣa*, *kāla*, *māyā* and deities (like-*brahmā* etc.) as the cause, the creator and the controller of the universe. He is the Master of masters and God of the infinite number of universes. He alone is the transcendental reality endowed with the highest excellence and glory.⁴⁸⁰

A person who has a profound affection for Parabrahman cannot love anything else besides Him, even if forced to do so. True devotee loves Parabrahman alone singularly. The dedicated love of the ultimate quality arises in the heart, caused by constant remembrance of the glory of Parabrahman.⁴⁸¹ A *bhakta* possessing the deepest love for Parabrahman cannot do anything contrary to the will and command of Parabrahman.⁴⁸² He persists incessantly drowned in Parabrahman-consciousness, and that he cannot forget Him even for a fraction of a second.⁴⁸³ Generally, love brings conditions and demands but the love for Parabrahman must be unconditional and free from demand. It must be unmatched, unmitigated, steady, and unfaltering.

⁴⁷⁹ SSSK 409

⁴⁸⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/59

⁴⁸¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/48

⁴⁸² Vac. Kar. 11

⁴⁸³ Vac. Gadh. 1/44

The love based on the appealing physical qualities is not trustworthy, for it may divert onto a person or thing other than Parabrahman. The love for Parabrahman must be as intense and strong as one's love for his body and its relations.⁴⁸⁴

Those *bhaktas* who love Parabrahman with an understanding of His divine glory become the vessel to receive the stream of intense love of Parabrahman. Bhadreśadāsa confirms: “यतस्ते यथोक्तब्रह्मगुणैर्युता मां भजन्ते तस्मान्मेतीव प्रिया इति भाव ।” (BGSB 12/20, p.275) “Those who worship me with *brahmabhāva* are my utmost beloved devotees.” The most significant barrier in the way of unwavering love towards Parabrahman is our three *māyic* *guṇas*. The aspirant must rise above the influence of three *guṇas*, his body-awareness knowing that he is a pure *ātman* and loving Parabrahman alone. Such *nirguṇa ātmic* love alone is the true basis of *bhakti*. The efflorescence of *nirguṇa brahmasvarūpa-prīti* (non-ephemeral Akṣara-like *ātmic* love) has the superior quality of affiliating one to Parabrahman with intense exclusive love and undivided fidelity. In it, there is self-forgetting. He rises above from these three *guṇas*. Nothing lures and attracts him, for he sees Parabrahman as the supreme value and the fountainhead of all joy and happiness. He experiences unceasing novelty and ever-increasing joy of bliss in the *svarūpa* of Parabrahman.⁴⁸⁵

10.2 The Way to Learn *Bhakti*

In the way of spiritual fulfillment, one needs an ideal role model. We learned that *bhakti* is the essential means to reach the ultimate; therefore, Akṣarabrahman is the ideal for the seekers to learn *bhakti*. Just as a bridge serves as a medium to help one cross easily over from one side of the river to the other, Akṣarabrahman manifests as the Guru and serves as a bridge. He saves us from drowning in *māyā*, helps us to

⁴⁸⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/57

⁴⁸⁵ BGSB 3/28, p.83

cross the ocean of *saṃsāra* and teaches us to attain Paramātman through his *bhakti*.⁴⁸⁶ Along with it as the Bhāṣyakāra claims: “परब्रह्मणि भक्तिं तु ब्रह्मभावोप्यपेक्षते”⁴⁸⁷

“*Bhakti* needs *brahmabhāva* for its completion.”⁴⁸⁸ And for *brahmabhāva* Akṣarabrahman’s company is inevitable. Thus, the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru is the only means to attain *bhakti*. This is called *pratyakṣa bhakti* as well. A *mumukṣu* (seeker) having *mumukṣutvam* (earnest desire for *mokṣa*) should have first of all firm faith in the words of the genuinely great *sādhū* (the Akṣarabrahman - Guru); should listen carefully to and ponder over the words of the great *sādhū*; should serve him in thought, speech and action; should keep up sincerely the company of him. Certainly, then the right devotion based on the knowledge of Parabrahman's greatness and glory grows and blooms in the heart.

This great sadhu is the *Akṣara*-Guru, who himself is the finest devotee, the perfect obedient servant of Parabrahman, and the knower of the secret wisdom of Parabrahman. Thus, he is our best friend, philosopher, and guide to nourish and nurture devotion in our hearts. Therefore, one who lives by the words of Parabrahman, and sees Parabrahman and the Guru (the truly great *sādhū*) as faultless, and sees in them all good and divinity - finds the spontaneous growth of devotion in one's heart and consequently, he becomes *brahmarūpa*.⁴⁸⁹ Bhadreśadāsa avers while discussing on *bhakti* at the famous verse *brahmabhūtaḥ*: “ब्रह्मरूपो यो मुमुक्षुः स एव परमात्मपराभक्तियोग्यो भवति इति सिद्धान्तितम्” (BGSB 18/54, p.361)

“Only one who is *brahmarūpa* is eligible to offer *bhakti* to Parabrahman.” Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa makes a decision: “One who does not proffer *bhakti* to Parabrahman after becoming *brahmarūpa* cannot be said to have accomplished

⁴⁸⁶ KUSB 3/2 pp.123-124

⁴⁸⁷ SSSK 386

⁴⁸⁸ BSSB 3/2/23, p.300

⁴⁸⁹ APM 4/53/60

final liberation.” (Vac. Loya 7, p.303) It is clear that in the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, the profound company of the great *sādhū* (the *Akṣara*-Guru) brings the intense love for Parabrahman with the deepest attachment towards him. The union with the *Akṣara*-Guru should rest on the principles of devotion, affection, closeness, esteem, unreserved frankness, servility, and compliance. The affection for the great *sādhū* (the *Akṣara*-Guru) should be as deep and natural as is for one's body and its relation. Such an overwhelming love and attachment for the *Akṣara*-Guru is the best means for self-realization, the best means to understand the transcendental splendor of Parabrahman, and the best means to have the Parabrahman-realization.⁴⁹⁰

This type of extraordinary love and keenness for Parabrahman, trust, faith, and firm knowledge of the manifest (perceptibly present/*pratyakṣa*) form of Parabrahman are predestined factors. Thereafter the devotee is unable to live without Him even for a fraction of a second, forget his Parabrahman-consciousness, he constantly remains drowned in Parabrahman-remembrance, and he dwells in most obedient servility. As a result, he is a worthy and a great devotee to remain in the service of Parabrahman Himself.⁴⁹¹ However, not all seekers can achieve such a great company of sadhus. Therefore, to serve the *parama-ekāntika satpuruṣa* (the *Akṣara*-Guru) is a rare fortune earned by a person of great merits (*punya*).⁴⁹² He who serves the *Akṣara*-Guru with heart and *ātman*, stands favored by Parabrahman and he certainly finds a place in the highest abode to serve Parabrahman eternally.⁴⁹³ Consequently, this service to the *Akṣara*-Guru brings the highest form of devotion blooms in the heart. He attains the *samādhi*-state of *upāsanā*.⁴⁹⁴

In this manner, the Guru teaches us that all the *seva* in the *satsang* fellowship should be cultivated without any selfish motive, ego, discrimination, or fault-finding. One

⁴⁹⁰ Vac. Var. 11

⁴⁹¹ BGSB 7/17, p.165

⁴⁹² Vac. Gadh. 2/59, BGSB 7/3, p.157

⁴⁹³ Vac. Gadh. 2/28

⁴⁹⁴ Vac. Var. 3, Vac. Amd. 3

earns the favor of Parabrahman only when the *Akṣara*-Guru and the devotees of Parabrahman are served with a changed vision of seeing them as divine, faultless, and vice-free. Thus, one should think of himself as the most fortunate of getting the chance to serve Parabrahman and His devotees.⁴⁹⁵

10.3 *Bhakti* Purifies the Self

The most significant benefit of *bhakti* is its power to eradicate the vicious nature and faults of an aspirant. When an aspirant serves and offers *bhakti* with heart and *ātman*, his sins get eliminated, his vices get destroyed, his rebirth-causing desires(*vāsanā*) and inclinations get worn out and he becomes the best devotee dearer to Parabrahman.⁴⁹⁶ Thus, *Bhakti* helps in purifying the self, destroying *māyā*, fixing the mind perpetually on Parabrahman, and accomplishing detachment from worldly objects.⁴⁹⁷

Bhadreśadāsa also confirms that a devotee who is offering *bhakti* with *brahmabhāva* “न शोचति न काङ्क्षति” neither grieves nor desires.⁴⁹⁸ However, *bhakti* is the loving devout worship of a pure heart. It entails giving up on deceit, anger, lust, greed, pride, ego, jealousy, envy, etc. The most intense untainted love and attachment (*premalaksanā-bhakti*) towards Parabrahman encompasses the virtues of Akṣara. Therefore, *Akṣarabrahman-Gunātītā satpurush* is the prerequisite of the whole range of the *bhakti-sādhana*.

Bhadreśadāsa explains that *bhakti* is love for Parabrahman supported by knowledge of Parabrahman's glory and faithful conviction of His power of granting liberation. *Bhakti* reinforces in intensity and extensity when Parabrahman as the source of all joy and bliss is well-known as such. It is the certitude that Parabrahman is the

⁴⁹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/41

⁴⁹⁶ Vac. Var. 5

⁴⁹⁷ Var. Gadh. 1/19

⁴⁹⁸ BGSB 18/54, p.360

embodiment of imperishable, infinite, inexhaustible bliss, and whatever little joy and happiness we find in the world of material existence is just a tiny droplet from His unfathomable ocean of happiness. The bliss supplying from Parabrahman assuages all the senses, the mind, and the *ātman* simultaneously. Once this kind of highest glory of Parabrahman is known decisively, the detachment in everything except Parabrahman develops naturally. When the senses, the mind, and the *ātman* are totally anchored in Parabrahman, the highest consummation occurs, giving rise to the rapturous union with Him. Seeking Parabrahman by way of *bhakti* leads to authentic self-ascent and oneness (qualitative) with Him.⁴⁹⁹ The BG states:

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।

साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः ॥⁵⁰⁰

“Even if the most sinful person chooses to worship me with single-minded loving devotion, such a person must be regarded as a Sadhu because of making the right resolution.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments here: “परमात्मानन्यभावपूर्वकभजनैकव्यवसाययुक्तः” (BGSB 9/30, p.219) “Here, the single-minded devotion towards Parabrahman is extolled.” According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, devotion to Parabrahman is the exclusive means to liberate oneself from the incumbrance of *māyā*. Therefore, Parabrahman should be worshipped with undaunted devotion.⁵⁰¹ But norms and regulations must not be violated. *Bhakti* should be supplemented by righteous conduct. One should not worship the Supreme Parabrahman, disregarding the codes of pious moral life.⁵⁰²

Moral laws are Parabrahman's commands. So, a devotee should not ignore them. They must abide by them. For example, A true devotee does not accept or enjoy anything without offering it first to his Lord. He does not waste his time in fruitless talks and activities. In all his activities, he keeps his mind fixed on Parabrahman. In

⁴⁹⁹ MUSB 2/2/8, p.278, BGSB 18/54, pp.360-361

⁵⁰⁰ BG 9/30

⁵⁰¹ Vac. Gadh. 1/19

⁵⁰² Vac. Gadh. 1/77

other words, he remembers Parabrahman ceaselessly, by constantly chanting Parabrahman's name, and thus does not forget Parabrahman-consciousness even for a moment, because the reward (even) for a virtuous scholar lies in engaging oneself in *satsaṅga* and *bhakti*, without which there is certainly a possibility for a fall and degeneration in spiritual life.⁵⁰³ And he who keeps his mind fixed on Parabrahman whilst abiding by all regulations; as a result, his actions fail to bind him. Therefore, a devotee should not abandon norms established by Parabrahman out of fear of slander by ignorant and cruel people.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* counsels: “Also a wise scholar, whether he has no desire at all, or is actuated by all sorts of desires; - he should worship the Supreme Person with intense love-devotion.”⁵⁰⁴ The knowledge of Parabrahman's highest glory (*māhātmya-jñāna*) makes a devotee cherish Him as the Supreme value. He, therefore, practices devotion both as a discipline and as a fulfillment. Thus, devotion with intense love, knowledge of Parabrahman's glory, and undivided fidelity to the eternally perfect Parabrahman can remove all our miseries and internal sorrow. This is the exclusive path of *bhakti* on which billions of devotees are trading today.

10.4 Pativratā-Bhakti

The most accepted type of devotion amongst all the *bhakti* movements is *pativratā-bhakti* (loyal or faithful devotion). Parabrahman likes the devotees who are associated with Him by the strong bonds of love, loyalty, and dedication like that of a wife who is most loyally committed to her husband (*pativratā-stri*). Such love and attachment and devotion unto Parabrahman is portrayed as '*pativratā-bhakti*'. Such '*pativratā-bhakti*' is expected of everyone who wishes pleasing Parabrahman. Such singular devotion with undivided fidelity helps in drawing the grace of

⁵⁰³ Vac. Var. 11

⁵⁰⁴ *Śrīmadbhāgavatam* 1/7/10

Parabrahman. The concept of *pativratā-bhakti* is endorsed to extricate a man from his chronic tendency of viewing Parabrahman as a human being.⁵⁰⁵

Thus, *pativratā-bhakti* is to understand that, my Parabrahman is the abode of an infinite number of infinitely auspicious qualities and He is free from all imperfections, and He is the bottomless ocean of all bliss and happiness such that even a single act of seeing (*darśana*) Him is so fulfilling that he stands in need of nothing. On the other hand, the worldly pleasures are fractional, for each sense-organ is able to enjoy its own limited pleasure. What eyes enjoy, ears, tongue etc., cannot experience, while in the case of Parabrahman, all pleasures come jointly in a synthetic conjoined form like a flood of bliss which simultaneously satisfies all the senses and the mind.⁵⁰⁶ The concept of *pativratā-bhakti* has its roots also in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (9/34), wherein Kṛṣṇa says:

मन्मना भव मद्भक्तो मद्याजी मां नमस्कुरु ।

मामेवैष्यसि युक्तवैवमात्मानं मत्परायणः ॥⁵⁰⁷

“Focus your mind on me, be my devotee, and be my propitiator. Offer obeisance to me alone. Affixing your mind in this way on me, regard me alone as your supreme goal, and you will attain me.” Thus, when a devotee holds supreme Parabrahman Puruṣottama alone as his sole foundation, rescuer, and peer of the realm. He engrosses his heart and *ātman* in meditating upon Him and pleasing Him; he reaches none else but alone in his state of liberation.

For *Pativratā-bhakti*, the best examples are the *gopīs* of Vṛndāvana. The *gopīs* used to say: from the day we had the great fortune to touch the holy feet of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, all the inclinations of the world have become scornful like deadly poison. Just as a *pativratā* woman is not captivated and charmed by the handsomeness of

⁵⁰⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/19, 2/62

⁵⁰⁶ Vac. Gadh. 2/1

⁵⁰⁷ BG 9/34

the personality of Indra, demi-gods or a royal prince, and rather withdraws her gaze with antipathy and disgust, so *pativratā-bhakta's* mind is totally united with Parabrahman. He is so committed to Parabrahman that he can never be pleased by any being other than Him.⁵⁰⁸ In this way, the devotee should always meditate upon that form of Parabrahman, who has assumed human form and has become visible (perceptibly manifest) before them. The other forms of previous incarnations, though they are of the same Parabrahman, need not be meditated upon. Thus, unalterable fidelity should be offered to one's Parabrahman only. For example, Pārvatiji (Goddess Umā) had resolved to marry Lord Śivā, and with such a determination she tied up herself in severe tapas (austerities) to invoke and please Lord Śivā to accept her as his bride. She used to say: ‘I don't mind remaining unmarried for many births but shall not marry anyone except my Lord Śivā.’⁵⁰⁹ The BG confirms it:

भक्त्या त्वनन्यया शक्य अहमेवंविधोऽर्जुन ।

ज्ञातुं द्रष्टुं च तत्त्वेन प्रवेष्टुं च परन्तप ॥⁵¹⁰

“However, through single-minded devotion alone, I can be seen in this form, can be known in essence, and also can be reached.” Bhadreśadāsa comments: “*त्वनन्यया मत्स्वरूपैकनिष्ठया अव्यभिचरितया भक्त्या परमदिव्यभावसभरप्रकृष्टप्रेमलक्षणया ... अखण्डिततया साक्षात्कृतार्थनिमग्नतां प्राप्तुं शक्यः।*” (BGSB 11/54, p.262) “Through this focused and undeviated profound loving devotion, the seeker can experience the constant bliss of Parabrahman forever.” He explains further that a devotee should, therefore, offer such loyalty to Parabrahman. A faithful devotee would never equate the manifest form of incarnate Parabrahman with other (mortal) human beings. Conversely, a devotee who engages himself in the meditations disregarding the form of Parabrahman visible (perceptibly-manifest) before him, is likely to be drawn towards other forms also, either human or semi-divine. Thus, one should develop complete fidelity to the currently manifest

⁵⁰⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/62

⁵⁰⁹ Vac. Loya 11

⁵¹⁰ BG 11/54

form of Parabrahman visible before him in human form, even though there is no difference between this manifest Parabrahman visible to him in human form and His previous incarnations. The whole logic of the concept of *pativratā-bhakti* aims at uprooting from the mind the tendency of conceiving Parabrahman's form on par with ordinary mortals, in addition to making the *vr̥tti-nirodha* (arrest of mental modifications) on a single goal.⁵¹¹

In this manner, as per the principle of *pativratā-bhakti*, none but Parabrahman Puruṣottama alone ought to be contemplated as the highest goal. In whatever form/guise a devotee comes in a personal face-to-face relationship with Him during His manifestation on earth, He becomes the singular and sufficient object of worship for him. This further suggests that no other *avatāra* of the past, nor any deity or object, can serve as a substitute for Him.⁵¹²

11. *Ekāntiki Bhakti*

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, in the *nitya-prārthana* (daily prayer) sung before Parabrahman in the evening, where the followers request the Lord to bless them with *ekāntiki bhakti* based on the knowledge of the magnificence and merit of Parabrahman, and the company of the best *ekāntika-bhakta*.⁵¹³ *Ekāntiki bhakti* includes four factors:⁵¹⁴

1. *Dharma* (righteous duties)
2. *Jñāna* (knowledge)
3. *Vairāgya* (detachment)
4. *Bhakti* (devotion)

⁵¹¹ BGSB 7/17, p.165

⁵¹² Vac. Gadh. 3/16

⁵¹³ Premānanda svāmī's *prāthanā, Kirtana muktāvalī*, Vol. 1 , p.7

⁵¹⁴ Vac. Panch. 3

Bhadreśadāsa also reiterates:

धर्मो ज्ञानं च वैराग्यं भक्तिश्चैतैस्त्रिभिर्युता।

ज्ञेय एकान्तिको धर्मः प्रभुप्रसादसाधनम् ॥⁵¹⁵

“*Bhakti* that is accompanied by *dharma*, *jñāna* and *vairāgya* should be known as *ekāntika dharma*, which is the means to attain Paramātmā’s grace.” This *ekāntika dharma* is also called *bhāgavata dharma*. Bhadreśadāsa mentions the reason:

अयं भागवतो धर्मः सम्बन्धादुच्यते हरेः।

यस्य संस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवस्तु हरेरिह॥⁵¹⁶

“This *ekāntik dharma* is also called *bhāgavata dharma* because it pertains to Paramātmā to establish *bhāgavata dharma*.” Here, *ekāntika dharma* is equal to *ekāntiki bhakti* since both consists of the abovementioned four parts.⁵¹⁷ Svāmīnārāyaṇa holds the view that the teleology behind the descent (incarnation) of Parabrahman on earth is the establishment and promotion of '*ekāntika dharma* ' also known as '*bhāgavata-dharma*'.⁵¹⁸ “It is this *dharma* that is known as *bhāgavata* or *ekāntika dharma*. In fact, this type of *dharma* is not distinct from *bhakti*; they are both one.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/21, p.621)

It is not thoroughly correct that Parabrahman’s descent on earth is merely to establish moral order and ethical standards. But it is more comprehensive *dharma* called '*ekāntika-dharma*' whose goal is to perfect a person both morally and spiritually to attain ultimate emancipation. The ethical norms and moral order may be established and restored even by the efforts of a moralist or a sage or a more influential social worker. As against this, *ekāntika-dharma* does not divorce devotionism (*bhakti*) from morality/righteousness (*dharma*), for no *dharma* has to be sovereign of direct reference and relatedness to Parabrahman. The concept of

⁵¹⁵ SSSK 387

⁵¹⁶ SSSK 388

⁵¹⁷ Vac. Var. 3

⁵¹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 3/21

bhāgavat-dharma/ekāntika-dharma does not dichotomize between *dharma* and *bhakti*; rather, they are treated as the two sides of the same coin.

The daily norms of individual & social ethics are much below the role and status of *ekāntika-dharma* (i.e., *bhāgavat-dharma*). And it is with the help of *bhāgavat-dharma* alone that a *jīva* (an individual self) can overcome the influence of *māyā* and intersect the continuity of *saṃsāra*.⁵¹⁹ More specifically, as we knew that the *varṇāśrama*-duties and the norms of individual and social ethics possess value much less compared to *ekāntika-dharma*. They in themselves at the most fulfill the desires for *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma*, give social recognition, fame, and worldly peace and happiness, but cannot fulfill the highest goal of ultimate emancipation.⁵²⁰ Thus, pure ethics of dutifulness devoid of its reference to Parabrahman (as enjoined in the *ekāntika-dharma* concept) is a votary of the place in celestial, heavenly abodes of deities (*svargādidevaloka*). The consequence of this achievement is also stressed in *Bhāgavat-Gītā*.

ते तं भुक्त्वा स्वर्गलोकं विशालं

क्षीणे पुण्ये मर्त्यलोकं विशन्ति ।⁵²¹

“On the expiry of the stock of merits, the soul has to return to the world of pain and suffering.” Svāminārāyaṇa traces the genesis of *ekāntika-dharma* alias *ekāntiki-bhakti* in the *Vāsudeva-māhātmya* section of *Viṣṇukhaṇḍa* of *Skandapurāṇa*.⁵²² In *ekāntiki-bhakti*, righteous conduct (*dharma*), right knowledge (*jñāna*), and total detachment (*vairāgya*) are interpreted as the head, the heart, and the feet respectively of *bhakti*. Such one centered (*ananya*) exclusive (*ekāntiki*) *bhakti* alone is capable of uniting seeker with Parabrahman. And it is this *ekāntiki-bhakti* that is considered to be supreme (*parā-bhakti*) in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School.

⁵¹⁹ Vac. Gadh. 3/21

⁵²⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/21

⁵²¹ BG 9/21

⁵²² *Vāsudeva mahātmya* 2/1,3,4

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, over-all purification and all-round development is emphasized to become eligible to receive the grace of Parabrahman. The transparency of thought, speech, and action, in its true sense can be achieved, when *ekāntika-dharma* is realized. As said earlier, *ekāntika-dharma* comprises of four complementary virtues, namely, righteous conduct (*dharma*), right knowledge (*jñāna*), detachment (*vairāgya*), and undivided devotion to Parabrahman with the knowledge of His glory (*māhātmya-jñāna-yukta-bhakti*). For two hundred years, *ekāntika-dharma* has been burgeoning in the tradition; specifically, Svāminārāyaṇa restored and re-established the long-lost tradition of *ekāntika-dharma*, he is described as '*ekāntika-dharmapravartaka* by Niṣkulānanda Svāmī, the author of '*Bhaktacintāmaṇī*'.⁵²³

The *ekāntika-dharma* (i.e., *bhāgavat-dharma*) is lived, nourished and nurtured by the *parāma ekāntika satpuruṣa* (*Akṣara-Guru*). Therefore, in order to realize it, one must live in the close company of *parāma ekāntika satpuruṣa*.⁵²⁴ Although *ekāntika-dharma* is described in the scriptures, it is not realizable through the self-taught method; nor can one claim to teach it autonomously. In and through the company of an *ekāntika-dharma* realized *satpuruṣa*, one can realize and acquire it, and not otherwise. And this '*dharma*' and '*bhakti*' are not two distinct components. They are a single organic whole, and hence, whether one speaks of *ekāntika-dharma* or of *ekāntiki-bhakti*, it implies the same integrated spiritual (*ādhyātmic*) endeavor (*sādhana*).⁵²⁵

The performance of righteous actions as enjoined in the SSS is called *dharma*.⁵²⁶ Right knowledge of essential nature of the *jīva* (individual self), *īśvara* (cosmic selves), *māyā-prakṛti* (matter), Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman is called *jñāna*.⁵²⁷

⁵²³ Nishkulanandswami, Bhakta Chintamani, at the end of every chapter.

⁵²⁴ SSS p.331, Vac. Gadh. 1/54

⁵²⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/60

⁵²⁶ SSS, p.333

⁵²⁷ SSS, p.339, APM 1/36/7

The absence of interest, involvement, and attachment in everything except Akṣarapuruṣottama is called *vairāgya*.⁵²⁸ Intense love for the manifest form of Parabrahman, together with the knowledge of His greatness, is called *bhakti*.⁵²⁹ And all these four components together constitute what is known as *ekāntiki-bhakti*. When all these four virtues are fully realized, the devotee is called *ekāntika-bhakta*, *ananya-bhakta*.⁵³⁰ These four components are interrelated. *Dharma* (moral-ethical-righteous conduct) aids in the attainment of *jñāna* (right knowledge); *jñāna* breeds *vairāgya* (detachment in the world); *vairāgya* produces *parama-jñāna* (supreme wisdom) of the transcendental glory of Parabrahman with eternal form (*sadā-sākāra*-Parāmeśvara), which in turn engenders the highest form of *bhakti*. The knowledge of Brahman (*Brahma-jñāna*) and detachment (*vairāgya*) bereft of *bhakti* are neither appealing nor emancipating. Of course, *dharma*, *jñāna*, and *vairāgya* have their own value (as means) in leading one to Parabrahman; nevertheless, *bhakti* alone has the supreme value. Bhadrēśadāsa explains:

भक्तेरेवेह प्राधान्यं धर्मादिकचतुष्टये।

भक्तेरगतयैवैषां साधनत्वप्रबोधनात् ॥⁵³¹

“*Bhakti* alone is paramount amongst the four components of *ekāntik dharma*. In fact, the other three (*dharma*, *jñāna*, *vairāgya*) are described as tools that are supplementary to *bhakti*.” The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates that *bhakti* unites one with Parabrahman, and liberates from the chains of *māyā*. It is the *māhātmya-jñāna-yukta-bhakti* which has the exclusive superiority of liberating man from the clutch of *māyā*, even without the help of the other three components. It alone is capable of deracinating hardened *vāsanās* (cravings-desires), and cutting the bondage of benighted actions (*avidyā-karma*) asunder.⁵³² Therefore, if, ever, the righteous conduct (*dharma*), right knowledge (*jñāna*), and detachment (*vairāgya*) distract

⁵²⁸ SSS, p.344

⁵²⁹ SSS, p.348

⁵³⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/19, SSS p.331

⁵³¹ SSSK 390

⁵³² Vac. Var. 3

from or arrest the growth of *bhakti*; then it is they that should give way to *bhakti*.⁵³³ Thus righteousness (*dharma*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and detachment (*vairāgya*) are the complementary components of *bhakti*.⁵³⁴ Moral or righteous conduct (*dharma*), as enjoined in the scriptures, is the promoter of *bhakti* and *jñāna*. And *vairāgya* (detachment) is the complementary counterpart of *bhakti*. Non-attachment to everything except Parabrahman is *vairāgya*. Thus, both union with Parabrahman and ultimate liberation is achievable with the help of *bhakti* alone. Nevertheless, to keep *bhakti* untainted and make it most effective forever, the other three are advocated as ancillary means to *bhakti*.⁵³⁵ If *bhakti* is escorted by the righteous conduct (*dharma*), then only it is valuable. How can a lover of Parabrahman ever disregard the duties ordained by Him and thus displease Him? For a devotee, being duty-bound (*dharma-baddha*) also is a part of *bhakti*.

In this way, the central theme of *ekāntiki-bhakti* is to keep Parabrahman alone in view, and hence, one remains engrossed in Parabrahman-consciousness throughout. Parabrahman alone is the goal and He alone is the means and the strength. An *ekāntika-bhakta* does not desire for anything else but union with Parabrahman through devotion. The BU explains this ultimate goal:

मैत्रेय्यात्मनो वा अरे दर्शनेन

श्रवणेन मत्या विज्ञानेनेदं सर्वं विदितम् ॥⁵³⁶

“Verily, Parabrahman is to be seen, to be heard, to be perceived, to be marked, O Maitreyī! When we see, hear, perceive, and know Him, then all this is known.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments: “पुनः पुनः प्रवर्तनात्मकाभ्यासबलेन प्रकर्षं गतः स स्मरणव्यापारो यदाभ्यासमनपेक्ष्यैव साहजिकः स्वाभाविकश्च भवति स साक्षात्कार उच्यते तदा तस्य तैलधारावदविच्छिन्नस्मृतिसन्तानलाभात् प्रत्यक्षसमानाकारोनवरतः परमात्मानुभवो जायते” (BUSB 2/4/5, p.125)

⁵³³ Vac. Gadh. 2/26

⁵³⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/32

⁵³⁵ Vac. Var. 3

⁵³⁶ BU 2/4/5

“If one does constantly *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsa* in this way, one attains *sākṣātkāra* (realization) automatically. After that, one can remember Parabrahman like the constant flow of oil without any interruption as he sees Parabrahman in front of his eyes. That experience is the true fruit of *ekāntiki bhakti*.” Thus, *ekāntiki bhakti* is a blend of devotion, worship, and service. It is a combination of two fold devotional forms, namely, *pativrata-bhakti* and *dāsatva-bhakti*. It is a deep devotion like that of a most loyal, dedicated wife having total fidelity to her husband and devotion in-servitude. She keeps only her husband in her heart and desires only her grace. “Single-minded devotees do not crave for worldly wealth but aspire for the grace of Parabrahman.”⁵³⁷

Nevertheless, in *ekāntiki-bhakti*, a devotee thinks of himself as *ātman*; but neither as man nor as a woman. He transcends earthly peculiarities of sex, caste, class etc. He thinks of himself as *ātman*, distinct from three *guṇas* (of *prakṛti*, *māyā*), identifies himself with Akṣarabrahman, and having thus attained similarity with Akṣarabrahman. He worships the supreme Puruṣottama Parabrahman.⁵³⁸ In short, having become pure and pious and consummate like Akṣarabrahman, one can truly attain the highest level of *parā-bhakti*. The *Gītā*, too, stresses the same point. “He who attains me and worships me with undivided devotion attains *brāhmic*-state beyond three *guṇas*”⁵³⁹ Thus becoming *brahmarūpa* (Akṣarabrahman-like) and worshipping Parabrahman with intense love is the basis of *ekāntiki-bhakti*. So, in the final lonesome (*ante*) stage, Parabrahman alone (*ekam*) remains in view, and hence, it is called *ekāntiki-bhakti*.⁵⁴⁰

The *ekāntika-bhaktas* are profoundly soaked in the love of the personality of Parabrahman. For them, Parabrahman's love is enormously more remarkable than

⁵³⁷ *Śrīmadbhāgavatam* 8/3/20, Vac. Gadh. 3/25

⁵³⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/3, 2/30

⁵³⁹ BG 14/26

⁵⁴⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/48

what devotees can bear towards Him. Here, love, reverence, knowledge of His greatness, non-attachment to worldly objects, awe, wonder, singular loyalty and faith - all mix and mingle with one another to produce a fusion of the *ekāntiki-bhakti*, supreme-*bhakti*, *parā-bhakti*, *bhagvata dharma* and *upāsanā*.⁵⁴¹ Since Parabrahman is the only object of their goal in life, worldly loss or gain is not a thing of concern. “Everything of Parabrahman they see and like, everything for Parabrahman they are ready to do, and everything that takes them to Parabrahman, they pine for.” In all the three states, namely, waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, - Parabrahman is the center of their life.⁵⁴²

11.1 Components of *Ekāntiki-Bhakti*

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta, the *ekāntika-dharma* system is unique. Without *brahmabhāva*, it cannot be achieved either. The whole of *ekāntiki-bhakti sādhanā* rests on four complementary virtues, namely *dharma*, *jñāna*, *vairāgya*, and *bhakti*, which are based on the aspirant’s own interest and inclination. It, therefore, becomes imperative to discuss the nature of each of these component-virtues in detail. So, let us have the analytical exposition of each of them to have a meaningful understanding of the same.⁵⁴³

11.1.1 *Dharma*

Bhadreśadāsa states:

आज्ञा हेर्गुरोश्चैव सदाचारादिरूपिणी।

शास्त्राऽऽदेशाऽऽत्मको धर्मो विधिनिषेधलक्षणः ॥⁵⁴⁴

“*Dharma* is defined as Paramātmā’s and the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru’s *ājñā* (command) to live morally and follow guidelines in the form of scriptural injunctions.” In this manner, words, commands, and directives given by

⁵⁴¹ SSS, p.331

⁵⁴² BGSB 6/30-32, pp.45-146, IUSB 7, pp.16-17

⁵⁴³ SSS, pp.331-332

⁵⁴⁴ SSSK 391

Svāminārāyaṇa and the *Parāma ekāntika satpuruṣa* (God-possessed, Guru) is defined as *dharma*. For the followers of Svāminārāyaṇa, the five vows (*pañca-vartamāna*) included in the basic eleven duties (*ekādaśa-niyama*) are the stepping stones to *dhārmik* life. The eleven ethical norms include the abstention from violence (*hiṃsā*), illicit sex-relation (*para-strī-saṅga*), non-vegetarianism (*matsya-māṃsa-bhakṣaṇa*), drinking (*madya-pāna*), suicide (*ātma-ghāta*), theft (*stenakarma/cori*), false accusation (*mithyā-apavāda*), vilification of any deity or *sādhu* (*deva-nindā*), tactual relationship with widows (*vidhavā-sparśa*), consumption of non-edible & non-potable foods and drinks (*abhakṣya-bhakṣaṇa*) and listening discourses from speakers who are anti-God.⁵⁴⁵

In addition to these, Svāminārāyaṇa has very clearly spelled out the daily duties, occasional duties, common duties, and the duties specific to one's station in life. He has also prescribed the codes for outer-inner purification and personal sanctity. It contains the codes of conduct for inter-personal dealings and relationships and also a reference concerning expiation and atonement. The precepts concerning religious life and the performance of rituals are included in it.⁵⁴⁶ Svāminārāyaṇa warns them who infringe the commands of *dharma*: “If one does not observe *dharma*, he should be known to be as foolish as one who tries to cross the ocean carrying a stone slab upon his head; he should also be considered to be like an outcast.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/35, p.470). Therefore, *bhakti* should be strengthened by *dharma*. For an aspirant, the control of senses and mind and overcoming chronic attachment to fivefold objects of enjoyments (*pañca-viśayas*) is possible through *dharma*. Hence, it is inevitable to be very sincere and cautious in obeying and observing all the norms and regulations (*ājñā*) established by Parabrahman, the Guru, and the scriptures. It

⁵⁴⁵ Satsangdiksha 26-43

⁵⁴⁶ Mahant Swami Maharaj has included the entire codes of conducts and norms for the devotees of the Svāminārāyaṇa faith in the *Satsangdiksha* scripture.

is required for a devotee-seeker ought to know all *dharma* (*niyama*), i.e., do's and don'ts applicable to him, and practice them sincerely and unconditionally.

Bhadreśadāsa comments on the BG: “One who does not know do's and don'ts, acts under the influence of their desires, disobeying scriptures, neither attains perfection nor happiness nor the supreme goal.”⁵⁴⁷ Then he warns: “एहिकमामुष्मिकं वा किमपि सुखमयं फलं न लभते” (BGSB 16/23, p.327) “He or she will not attain happiness not only here but also in the abode of Parabrahman.” Moreover, one who recites the name of Parabrahman and yet consistently indulges in deliberate transgression of Parabrahman-ordained moral laws enjoined through scriptures, is an imposter. It is an act of committing the unpardonable sin of betraying one's master, Parabrahman.⁵⁴⁸

9.1.1.1 Novel Contribution Towards *Varṇa-Āśrama*

Bhadreśadāsa avers:

विप्रः क्षत्रश्च वैश्यश्च शूद्रश्चेति चतुष्टयम्।

वर्णविभजनं प्रोक्तं सर्वाभ्युदयहेतुकम्॥⁵⁴⁹

Varṇa is a fundamental concept underlying Hindu society. In fact, it is not a social arrangement or segregation; it is rather a statement of how any society is arranged. It does not say society should be classified into classes. It says what classes or kinds of people exist in any society. There are four *varṇas*, 1. *Brāhmaṇa*, 2. *Kṣatrīya* 3. *Vaiśya*, 4. *Śūdra*. This classification is based on the functions people perform in any society. Then the four *āśramas* as Bhadreśadāsa explains:

ब्रह्मचर्यगृहस्थौ च वानप्रस्थस्तथा यतिः।

चत्वार आश्रमा ह्येते व्यवस्थातः प्रकीर्तिताः॥⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁷ BGSB 16/23, p.327

⁵⁴⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/77

⁵⁴⁹ SSSK 393

⁵⁵⁰ SSSK 392

Āśrama in Hinduism is one of four age-based life stages discussed in Indian texts of the ancient and medieval eras. The four *āśramas* are: *Brahmacarya* (student), *Gr̥hastha* (householder), *Vānaprastha* (retired) and *Sanyāsa* (renunciate). The *āśrama* system is one facet of the *dharma* concept in Hinduism. It is also a component of the ethical theories in Indian philosophy, where it is combined with four proper goals of human life (*puruṣārtha*), for fulfilment, happiness and spiritual liberation.

Although in ancient India there was no discrimination by the name of one's *varṇa* (caste) and *āśrama* (particular period of life). But under foreign rule, this discrimination was at its peak. It was a dark chapter of Indian history. The *Śūdra Varṇa* faced so many miseries due to this caste system. They were kept away even from spirituality and liberation. Which caste and creed is eligible for *brahmavidyā*? This question is vastly discussed in Indian philosophy. Among the hundreds of commentaries and expositions on the scriptures, Bhadrēśadāsa's view includes and highlights real humanity with spirituality. He echoes the ancient voice in the *Śugādhikaraṇa* of BS: “यो हि सकलदुःखात्यन्तनिवृत्तिपूर्वकं परमात्मपरमसुखाभिलाषी स सर्वोऽपि ब्रह्मविद्याधिकरयोग्यः” “One who wants to become free from the miseries and attain the bliss of Parabrahman is eligible for *brahmavidyā*.” Bhadrēśadāsa clearly mentions that one's liberation does not depend on one's caste or *āśrama*.

He further adds: “वर्णादिव्यवस्था हि संसाररक्षेकप्रयोजना निर्विघ्नपरमपुरुषार्थोपायानुष्ठानसहकारिणी च। अतो न हि श्रेयसः पथि ब्राह्मण एव श्रेष्ठः शूद्रश्च कनिष्ठ इति समयः। कदाचिद् विप्रोऽप्यज्ञोऽसदाचारः, शूद्रोऽपि प्राज्ञः प्रकृष्टाचारो वा स्यात्। तस्मात् सर्वे वर्णाः स्वस्वकर्मभिः समानमुपकारं भजन्त इति सर्वादरमात्रसंरक्ष्यः सर्वेषामुत्कर्षः।” “*Varṇa* and *āśrama* systems are applied in the society not to differentiate the people, like this is important and that is ordinary, but to support to fulfill the goal of attaining the ultimate liberation. Therefore, on the path of liberation, neither *Brahmin* is great, nor the *Śūdra* is inferior. Sometimes it is possible that a *Brahmin* lacks good qualities and a *Śūdra*

may possess those qualities. Thus, each and every caste who wants to attain higher spiritual goal has its significance.” As far as the Indian philosophical system is concerned, this *Svāminārāyaṇa* view adds a great contribution in the form of reformation to the entire Indian Vedānta system, which is based on liberty and harmony of society.⁵⁵¹

11.1.2 *Jñāna*

Jñāna reflects the knowledge one attains. Although every live being possesses knowledge but their proportion differs. In a specific term, Knowledge molds the metal of the self and uplifts it to the highest spiritual height. Knowledge (*jñāna*) implies self-knowledge (*ātma-niṣṭhā*), Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman-knowledge (*Akṣarapuruṣottama-niṣṭhā*).⁵⁵² Therefore, there is no liberation without the right knowledge.⁵⁵³ (*Ṛte jñānān muktiḥ*), because the attainer of the right knowledge attains supreme peace. As mentioned in the BG “ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परं शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति.”⁵⁵⁴ Right knowledge yields contentment and a sense of complete accomplishment in an elevated state.⁵⁵⁵

When we talk about self-realization, it is *ātmaniṣṭhā*. It consists of knowing oneself essentially as *ātman* (conscious-principle) distinct from psycho-physical body and its relations. More simply, The knowledge that the self is the knower and the body is the known, is *ātmaniṣṭhā*. The *ātman* is consciousness and has knowledge as its essential intimate quality. It is separate from and transcendent to *prakṛti* and its three *guṇas*. Thus, nothing that applies to the body applies to the *ātman*. The properties of the body and *ātman* are distinct, apart, and opposite. Such realization is *ātmaniṣṭhā*.⁵⁵⁶ When the devotee realizes *ātmaniṣṭhā*, a person is not moved or

⁵⁵¹ *Satsangdiksha* 12-17

⁵⁵² Vac. sar. 1, IUSB 15, pp.22-23

⁵⁵³ Vac. Loya 7

⁵⁵⁴ BG 4/39

⁵⁵⁵ Vac. Loya 2

⁵⁵⁶ Vac. sar. 1

affected by insult, honor, blame, praise, name, form, pain, pleasure, disease etc. His patience and perseverance are everlasting.⁵⁵⁷ Bhadreśadāsa also confirms: “एनम् आत्मानम् एवं नित्यत्वनिरविकरत्वदेहाविलक्षणादिगुणविषष्टतया विदित्वा गुरुकृपया विज्ञाय नानुशोचितुमर्हसि” (BGSB 2/25, p.32)

“By knowing from the Guru that the *ātman* is eternal, unchangeable, and distinct from the body,⁵⁵⁸ you are not supposed to indulge in sorrow.” In the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, when *ātmaniṣṭhā* combines with knowledge of Parabrahman's transcendental glory, the seeker feels fulfilled. He stands in need of nothing. It helps in deracinating vices such as anger, greed, lust etc. Thus *ātmaniṣṭhā* (self-realization) brings the inflow of all other good qualities and virtues. It dispels the *vāsanās* (desires) from the self.⁵⁵⁹ Therefore, those who want to eliminate worldly desires and attachment from worldly objects of enjoyment, and keep the mind focused on Parabrahman, should cultivate *ātmaniṣṭhā*.⁵⁶⁰ *Ātmaniṣṭhā*, therefore, is one of the significant means for pleasing Parabrahman and attaining emancipation.⁵⁶¹ Deficiency in *ātmaniṣṭhā* may cause fall and degeneration, because it sways the mind away when ups and downs of life vacillate one in pleasure and pain, and his mind gets fogged by ideas other than that of Parabrahman.⁵⁶² It seems that *ātmaniṣṭhā* alone is enough to fulfill the ultimate spiritual goal.

9.1.2.1 *Ātmaniṣṭhā* Alone is Not Sufficient

However, mere *ātmaniṣṭhā* without *brahmabhāva* and *Paramātmaniṣṭhā* is neither fruitful nor emancipating.⁵⁶³ Bhadreśadāsa explains by commenting on the *Kena Upaniṣad*:

⁵⁵⁷ Vac. Gadh. 1/61

⁵⁵⁸ KU 2/18,19, PU 4/9, CU 8/8/3

⁵⁵⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/73, 3/20

⁵⁶⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/1

⁵⁶¹ Vac. Gadh. 2/62

⁵⁶² Vac. Gadh. 3/1

⁵⁶³ Vac. Gadh. 2/65, 2/35, 2/26

तदेव ब्रह्म त्वं विद्धि नेदं यदिदमुपासते ॥

“तद् वाक्प्रेरकं एव ब्रह्म परं ब्रह्म इति त्वं परमात्मस्वरूपजिज्ञासुः विद्धिः ॥”(KeUSB 1/5, p.39)

“Parabrahman ought to be known and worshipped thoroughly since it is an ultimate entity to be known.” Therefore, If the knowledge does not develop into Parabrahman’s devotion (*bhakti*), it is of no reward. If the knowledge does not arouse the highest love and oneness with Parabrahman, it is all an intellectual gymnastic. It is knowledge-backed devotion that helps in pleasing Parabrahman and drawing His grace. Thus, Bhadrēśadāsa defines the *jñānī* as with *brahmabhāva* and total devotion towards Parabrahman.⁵⁶⁴

In the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedanta, knowledge always goes with devotion. When *Parāvidyā*, the higher knowledge of Brahman is realized, then the devotee sees Parabrahman alone in the intense light of consciousness-bliss and miscarries to perceive any other name or form which is under the range of *Mūla -prakṛti*.⁵⁶⁵ When Parabrahman alone remains shining in the consciousness, it forms a total emptiness (the state of absence of all names and forms in mind), the devotee stops to perceive one's body (*piṇḍa*) and the whole universe (*brahmāṇḍa*). He then sees the beautiful divine personality of Parabrahman in the radiating light of his heart.⁵⁶⁶ Bhadrēśadāsa expresses the true meaning of *ātmaniṣṭhā*:

अहमात्मास्म्यहं ब्रह्म ब्रह्मरूपे मयि प्रभुः।

इति साक्षाद्ब्रह्म योगाद् यो भावः सात्मरूपता॥⁵⁶⁷

“The state of being *ātmaniṣṭhā* means believing through direct association with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, I am the *ātman*, I am Brahman and Parabrahman resides in my *ātman*, which is *brahmarūpa*.” Similarly, he describes the ‘*ātmavān*’ as who is associated with *Akṣarabrahman* Guru.⁵⁶⁸ Only through this way, the

⁵⁶⁴ BGSB 7/16,17,18, pp.164-65

⁵⁶⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/24

⁵⁶⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/26

⁵⁶⁷ SSSK 402

⁵⁶⁸ BGSB 2/45

Svāminārāyaṇa School's *ātmaniṣṭhā* completes. When a devotee affiliates himself with Akṣarabrahman (the *Akṣara*-Guru) and gets in unison with him, the right knowledge blossoms to the greatest extent.⁵⁶⁹ Such a *jñānī* devotee (wise man) is described as the best among the devotees and spiritual aspirants, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.⁵⁷⁰

Thus, the *jñānī* is believed of his own self as the pure *ātman*, being-consciousness bliss (*sat-cid-ānanda*), stain-free, uncontaminated, immortal being; conversely, the food, sex, fashion, comforts, luxury, etc. pleasures of the world are perishable, insignificant, temporary, and repeated sources of pain; he assumes that his body, senses, mind ego, name, form, relations, properties etc. are also subject to the debacle. He, therefore, remains withdrawn from the external world while being well-settled internally in the meditation of Parabrahman in his heart. To him, life in the forest is as joyful-comfortable as it is in a royal palace in the kingdom; and vice versa. He is equipoised in honor and insult. For him, gold and dust are equal in value. In short, nothing agitates his mind, nor does anything attract or distract or bind him.⁵⁷¹

11.1.3 *Vairāgya*

Svāminārāyaṇa states, “Remaining detached from the body and the *brahmānda*, is the characteristic of *vairāgya*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/44, p.110) In this manner, the absence of interest and attachment in everything except Akṣara-Puruṣottama is called *vairāgya* (detachment).⁵⁷² *Vairāgya* is indifference and detachment both to one's body and the world. *Vairāgya*, in its true sense, emerges only after the realization of the right knowledge of the self, Brahman and the supreme self (Parabrahman). Here, the word 'right knowledge' denotes the metaphysical knowledge concerning

⁵⁶⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/24, 2/20

⁵⁷⁰ BG 7/18

⁵⁷¹ Vac. Loya 10, Vac. Gadh. 2/1

⁵⁷² SSS p.344

Parabrahman and philosophical principles, the knowledge of Parabrahman's transcendental greatness, and fourfold cosmic dissolutions. When *vairāgya* advances entirely, all desires for the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and the desires for body-care come to an end. True *vairāgya* uproots all names and forms except Parabrahman, the eternal supreme truth.⁵⁷³

Vairāgya defines the relationship between self and the world. It consists of remaining detached from one's body and the whole world. *Vairāgya* sprouts in the self when one (1) realizes self-knowledge (*ātmaniṣṭhā*), (2) realizes the perishable character of the objects of enjoyment of the world and all other celestial regions and abodes through the reflection of the four kinds of dissolutions (*pralaya*) (3) comprehends the transcendental glory and greatness of Parabrahman with great love and faith and (4) obtains the metaphysical knowledge of Parabrahman.⁵⁷⁴ The generation and steadfastness in *vairāgya* occur only through the words and *satsaṅga* (holy company) of the *sadGuru* (i.e., Akṣarabrahman Guru, *parāma ekāntika-satpuruṣa*).

This type of *vairāgya* certainly results in attaining supreme Parabrahman (*parama-pada*).⁵⁷⁵ Bhadrēśadāsa clears the point: ब्रह्मपरात्मभिन्नेषु रागाभावो विरागता । ज्ञानांशसहिता नित्यं भक्त्युपकारिणी भवेत् ॥⁵⁷⁶ “Dispassion towards all except for Brahman and Parabrahman is detachment. However, such detachment only supplements *bhakti* if it is perennially equipped with spiritual wisdom.” The knowledge of discrimination between eternal and non-eternal develops disinterest and distaste for the enjoyments pertaining to one's body and worldly pleasures. Thus, *vairāgya* brings freedom from worldly and bodily attachments. As long as these attachments are not connected with the proper

⁵⁷³ Vac. Var. 16

⁵⁷⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/1, *Vāsudeva mahātmya* 25/60

⁵⁷⁵ Vac. Sar. 11,18

⁵⁷⁶ SSSK 407

knowledge and right attitude, intense love and devotion to Parabrahman cannot be possible.

A devotee with profound detachment thinks that Parabrahman has created the fivefold objects of enjoyments (*pañca-viṣaya*) and the regions (or abodes) for the enjoyments (such as *svarga*, *satyaloka* etc.). The superior objects of enjoyment are created to eliminate the suffering caused by the painful objects of enjoyment. When the objects of enjoyment heavenly abodes of Indra, Brahmā etc., are so superior, then how limitlessly superior would be the joy and happiness in the highest abode of Parabrahman Himself? With this thought of wisdom, he turns away from the worldly objects of enjoyment and treads the path of *Paramapada*.⁵⁷⁷ The BG affirms:

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥⁵⁷⁸

“Undoubtedly, the mind is restless and difficult to restrain, but it is subdued by *abhyāsa* (constant vigorous spiritual practice with firm determination), and *vairāgya* (or detachment).” The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “वैराग्येण च स्वलक्ष्यातिरिक्तसकलविक्षेपक-पदार्थनिर्वेदोद्रेकेण प्रकृतिपुरुषादिपिपीलिकान्तेषु निखिलप्राकृतपदार्थेषु ध्येयप्रत्यनीकेषु दोषानुसन्धान-संजातवैतृष्ण्येन वा भक्तिमद्भिः गृह्यते वशीकर्तुं शक्यते । तुशब्दो मनोनिग्रहसम्भवं द्योतयन् पार्थोत्थापितां दुर्निग्रहस्याप्यनिग्रहताशंकां वारयति। आह च पतञ्जलिः 'अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः' (यो.सू. १/१२) इति।” (BGSB 6/35, p.148) “The mind is controlled through *vairāgya*. *Vairāgya* is the detachment towards everything except Parabrahman from a small ant and to the entire universe. If one possesses such *vairāgya* then, obstacles in the way of attaining the ultimate goal are perceived as flawed. The term ‘tu’ is used to show that the mind can be controlled even it may seem difficult. Patañjali also supports by saying that by constant effort and *vairāgya* mind comes under control.” Bhadrēśadāsa explains that to control the

⁵⁷⁷ Vac. Gadh. 3/37, Panch. 1, 4

⁵⁷⁸ BG 6/35

mind, *vairāgya* is the most prominent factor. In every branch of Indian philosophy, the concept of detachment is accepted. Unless one is not detached from worldly enjoyments, one can not connect to the ultimate reality. This unbroken principle is invariably described in the ancient scriptures.⁵⁷⁹ After analyzing the four components of *ekāntiki bhakti*, we can conclude by drawing the broad picture in one line that *ekāntiki bhakti* is the key principle of *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedanta. In this manner, it also becomes the firm conviction of Parabrahman.⁵⁸⁰

12. *Satsaṅga: Sāadhanā* for Daily Life

If spiritual endeavor and practice are not able to solve daily-life problems, then what is the benefit of doing it? *Svāminārāyaṇa* was more attentive in dealing with the practical problems faced by the seekers of liberation and their solutions which would enable them to reach the target effortlessly. In his *Vacanāmṛta*, we discover an extensive section dealing with these problems put forth by the disciples in the form of queries, inquiries, and questions. The practical advice and explanations suggested by him, after discussing each of the factors which assist or aid the spiritual perfection, is a unique contribution of *Svāminārāyaṇa* which is driving us to call his teaching a ‘practical philosophy’. Therefore, under this topic, we shall disclose some *Svāminārāyaṇa* traditions which are practiced in daily life.

12.1 *Satsaṅga*

Millions of devotees are practicing *satsaṅga* today. The word *satsaṅga* is composed of two words, namely, *sat* + *saṅga*. The word ‘*sat*’ connotes ‘true’, ‘real’ and ‘immutable’; whereas the word ‘*saṅga*’ connotes ‘congenial company’. Thus, the word ‘*satsaṅga*’ means the sincere maintenance of the company of the immutable

⁵⁷⁹ ‘अथेदं भस्मान्तं शरीरम्’ (ई.१७), ‘अनुपश्य यथा पूर्वं प्रतिपश्य तथापरे। सस्यमिव मर्त्यः पच्यते सस्यमिवाजायते पुनः’ (कठ.१/६), ‘श्रोभावा मर्त्यस्य यदन्तकैतत् सर्वेन्द्रियाणां जरयन्ति तेजः। अपि सर्वं जीवितमल्पमेव तवैव बाह्यस्तव नृत्यगीते’ (कठ.१/२६), ‘परिष्य लोकान् कर्मचितान् ब्राह्मणो निर्वेदमायान्नास्त्यकृतः कृतेन’ (मु.१/२/१२), ‘येनाहं नामृतास्यां किमहं तेन कुर्याम्’ (बृ.२/४/३) ‘जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युर्ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च। तस्मादपरिहार्येयं न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि’ (गी.२/२७), ‘अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते’ (गी.६/३५), ‘अभ्यासवैराग्याभ्यां तन्निरोधः’ (यो.सू.१/१२), ‘दृढवैराग्यवानेव जनः प्राप्नोति परमं पदम्’ (वच.का.७) ‘यस्तु वैराग्यवान् धार्मिकश्च भवति तस्य तु सर्वाण्यपीन्द्रियाणि वशीभूतानि भवन्तीति सर्वदा स सुखभाग् भवत्येव’ (वच.ग.अ.८) इत्यादिवाक्यानीह विरत्यनुकूलान्यनुसन्धेयानीति निरूपितं वैराग्यम्।

⁵⁸⁰ SSS p.331, Vac. Gadh. 1/75

(which is true and real). The word '*sat*' refers to the '*ātman*', '*Paramātmān*', *satpuruṣa* (the Akṣarabrahman Guru) and the holy scriptures (*satśāstra*).⁵⁸¹

In its larger sense, the word *satsaṅga* refers to the spiritual fellowship of the devotees consisting both of *sādhus* (monks) and *gṛhasthas* (householders) who are committed and dedicated to a spiritual and pious life. Thus, the study of the scriptures, listening to religious discourses from the Guru and competent authorities, singing the glory of Parabrahman, participating in devotion-oriented activities and sharing the company of the Parabrahman-committed fellow-devotees is *satsaṅga*. *Satsaṅga* is also an act of attending the religious assembly and participating in Parabrahman-centered activity. In this *saṃpradāya* (faith, movement), popularly, the word '*satsaṅga*' is also used for denoting the spiritual fellowship of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* followers.⁵⁸²

Svāminārāyaṇa here⁵⁸³ unpacks the glory of *satsaṅga* by referring to *Śrīmadbhāgavatam*: “Parabrahman is pleased mainly by *satsaṅga*. It alone puts an end to all bondages and attachments. Through *satsaṅga*, one can easily attain Parabrahman. Compared to *satsaṅga* neither the *yoga* of eight-fold disciplines, nor *Sāṃkhya* knowledge of discrimination; neither righteousness (*dharma*), nor the regular study of the Vedas (*abhyāsa*); neither severe austerity (*tapas*), nor renunciation (*tyāga*); neither offering oblations in the sacrificial fire and works of public utility (*iṣṭapurtam*), nor bestowal of gifts and charity (*dakṣiṇā*); neither observances of vows and fasts (*vrataṃ*), nor sacrifices and constant muttering of Parabrahman's name (*yajñā*); neither the holy acts of pilgrimages (*tirtha-yātra*), nor the fivefold observances of body-mind purity (*niyama*), and not even the fivefold

⁵⁸¹ *Satsaṅgadikṣha* 8, 9

⁵⁸² IUSB 15, pp.22-23

⁵⁸³ Vac. Gadh. 2/54

abstention rules of self-restraint (*yama*) can please Parabrahman as much as the *satsaṅga* does.⁵⁸⁴

By accepting *satsaṅga*, without any selfish motive, one certainly can have self-realization (*ātman-darśana*), which is the best means to attain emancipation. When one envisions over *satsaṅga* concerning the *ātman* and Parabrahman, all his thoughts and desires arising as a consequence of three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *tamas*) get exterminated. His doubts get dispelled, and resolute knowledge of glory becomes firm, and constant Parabrahman-consciousness (God-remembrance) becomes habitual. It unites one with Parabrahman through extraordinary affection. One becomes fault-free (*dosa-rahita*/viceless).⁵⁸⁵

Now the question may arise that how can one get this *satsaṅga*? Well, as the fruition of all good efforts and the meritorious deeds of the past lives, one gets *satsaṅga*. Of all means to reach Parabrahman, nothing equals *satsaṅga*. After attaining *satsaṅga*, one can bear pains and sufferings adamantly. The pain and calamity equal to the death sentence on the gallows gets softened and substituted by pain and suffering worth a thorn prick to him when a man does *satsaṅga* with a pure heart.⁵⁸⁶ Thus, *satsaṅga* must be viewed as pure, spiritual, and divine. And one who is convinced of the transcendental greatness of Parabrahman and Parabrahman-possessed *sādhū* (the *Akṣara*-Guru) has his roots firm in the *satsaṅga*.⁵⁸⁷ When *satsaṅga* becomes precious for a devotee, he develops oneness or identity with the great *sādhū* (the Guru). He cannot forsake the company of the great Sadhu and the devotees of Parabrahman. The accurate knowledge is attained, and love and attachment for Parabrahman become stronger through regular *satsaṅga*.

⁵⁸⁴ *Śrīmad bhāgavatam* 11/12/1-2, SV 1/17

⁵⁸⁵ Vac. Sar. 9

⁵⁸⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

⁵⁸⁷ Vac. Loya 17

When a person in the company of the Guru listens humbly to all his preaching and discourses; The ego-identification and identification with one's body and its relations come to an end only; thereafter, he reflects upon Guru's words and discovers valuable truths and exhortations of a pious life. As a result, disinterest and detachment towards worldly pleasures develop, and love and attachment for Parabrahman naturally flourish in the heart. *Ātma*-realization and Parabrahman-realization become effortlessly feasible through *santa-samāgama*, particularly through the *parama-ekāntika satpuruṣa* (the Akṣara Guru). Guṇātītānanda Svāmi states: "Without the association of the great *sādhu*, one does not get the bliss of *satsaṅga*."⁵⁸⁸ Bhadreśadāsa confirms and explains the form of Guru-*Satsaṅga*: "प्रतिबोधविदितं प्रतिबुध्यते ज्ञायते ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरोः सकाशात् परमात्मस्वरूपाद्यनेनेति प्रतिबोधो ह्युपदेशः। तथा हि परमात्मस्वरूपनिश्चयाय शिष्येण जिज्ञासिते तं प्रति ब्रह्मस्वरूपेण गुरुणा दीयमान उपदेश एव प्रतिबोधः, तेन विदितमिति प्रतिबोधविदितमिति" (KeUSB 2/4, p.44)

"This *satsaṅga*-statement can be understood through *parātibodh*. *Pratibodh* is the preception understood from the Guru to disciple in order to understand Paramātmā's form and qualities." The Bhāṣyakāra mentions the consequence of *satsaṅga*" Moreover, without *bhakti* and *satsaṅga*, even a great scholar may degenerate in life.⁵⁸⁹ Therefore, *satsaṅga* ought to be carried out with all honesty and sincerity. However, *satsaṅga* should not be done out of a desire for some worldly attainment such as getting a child, wealth, health, fame, power, worldly happiness, freedom from pain/punishment or other motives. It must be done purely for pleasing Parabrahman, for our own emancipation. When with such a selfless approach, *satsaṅga*, *santa-samāgama* is done, the seeker becomes free from vices, *vāsanās*, and ignorance, and attains *mokṣa* (emancipation).⁵⁹⁰ "इत्थमनेन मन्त्रेण सश्रद्धं साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुणातितगुरोर्दिव्योपदेशवचनैरेव प्राप्ताध्यात्मविद्या सद्यः सत्फला भवतीति सिद्धान्तितम्" (KeUSB. 2/4,

⁵⁸⁸ SV 1/29

⁵⁸⁹ *Satsangadiksha* 222

⁵⁹⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

p.46) “In this way, the *mantra* shows that through the preaching of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, *adhyātmavidyā* becomes fruitful in the true sense. This is the principle.” Further, the BG preaches directly to a seeker to have a company of such a *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru and become ‘नित्यसत्त्वस्थः’. Bhadrēśādāsa explains it: “साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपसत्पुरुषमागमेन त्वमपि तद्ब्रह्मसाधर्म्यं प्राप्य ब्रह्मरूपो भवेति” (BGSB 2/46, p.52) “Through the company of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru you will also become *brahmarūpa* devotee by attaining his similar qualities.”

12.2 Virtues Helpful in Spiritual Progress

For a true devotee, to develop good virtues and to eradicate untoward elements and vicious habits is an integral part of spiritual perfection. The discipline, qualities, and virtues that ought to be acquired and developed with sincere systematic efforts and constant goal-awareness and practice are discussed hereunder.⁵⁹¹ The nature and place of each one in the life of a seeker is also mentioned here.

इन्द्रियसंयमो मायाविकारादिविदारणम्।
 एकान्तधर्मपुष्टिश्च स्वात्मनि ब्रह्मरूपता॥⁵⁹²
 माहात्म्यसहितः सम्यङ्निश्चयः परमात्मनः।
 मोक्षः सर्वार्थसिद्धिर्हि प्रत्यक्षब्रह्मसङ्गतः॥⁵⁹³

⁵⁹¹ परमदिव्यभावनरसितप्रत्यक्षपरमात्मैकान्तिकभिवाञ्छा (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)

श्रेयसाभिकाङ्क्षा तत्परमप्रसादलाभः (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)

बाह्यान्तः करणसंयमनलक्षणं तपः (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3)

वेदान्तादिशास्त्राणां वचनेषु चाऽऽस्तित्क्यादिरूपः परमो विश्वास इत्यादि। (BSSB 1/1/1, p.4)

यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वविद्यस्य ज्ञानमयं तपः। (BSSB 1/1/1, p.6)

हि यतः ततः परमात्मसङ्कल्पलक्षणाभिध्यानादेव अस्य जीवेश्वरात्मनः बन्धविपर्ययौ जाग्रत्स्वप्नादितत्तदवस्थासु गमनरूपं बन्धनं तद् विपर्ययेण तत्तदवस्थातोवस्थान्तरप्राप्तिलक्षणा मुक्तिश्चेत्युभौभवतः। (BSSB 3/2/5, p.287)

तं स्वाच्छरीरात् प्रवहेन्मुञ्जादिविवेकीकां धैर्येण। (BSSB 3/2/13, p.294)

अविवक्षितार्थव्युदासको मात्रशब्दः। (BSSB 3/2/16, p.295)

सेव्यसेवकभावाद्यापादको भेदसम्बन्ध इष्यत इत्यत्राह। (BSSB 3/2/28, p.303)

परब्रह्मप्राप्तिपरमोपायतया सेतुत्वेन व्यपदेशात्। (BSSB 3/2/30, p.304)

⁵⁹² SSSK 136

⁵⁹³ SSSK 137

“Control over the senses,⁵⁹⁴ eradication of worldly desires,⁵⁹⁵ nourishment of *ekāntik dharma*,⁵⁹⁶ realizing one’s *ātman* as *brahmarūpa*, a complete conviction in Parabrahman along with the knowledge of his glory,⁵⁹⁷ *mokṣa*,⁵⁹⁸ and achievement of all there is to be achieved, all this is realized through association with the manifest Akṣarabrahman Guru.”

उत्साहोऽभ्यसनं धैर्यं विश्वासः संयमो बलम्।
 सुहृद्भावस्तथैक्यं च दासत्वं गुरुसेवनम्॥⁵⁹⁹
 प्रार्थना च मुमुक्षा च सहस्र गुणग्राहिता।
 प्राप्यादिकाऽनुसन्धानमनन्तर्दृष्टिस्थाह्निकम्॥⁶⁰⁰
 एतानि साधनानि स्युर्गुरुप्रसन्नता यतः।
 साक्षाद् बह्वप्रसङ्गस्तु तेष्वपि प्रमुखं भवेत्॥⁶⁰¹

“Enthusiasm,⁶⁰² repeated practice of spiritual endeavors,⁶⁰³ passion,⁶⁰⁴ faith,⁶⁰⁵ self-control,⁶⁰⁶ strength,⁶⁰⁷ fraternity, unity,⁶⁰⁸ humility, service towards the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru,⁶⁰⁹ prayer,⁶¹⁰ a desire for *mokṣa*,⁶¹¹ tolerance,⁶¹² perception of the good in others⁶¹³ awareness of such concepts is the significance and glory of that which we have attained in the form of *satsaṅga*, introspection, and daily offerings of *bhakti*. These are spiritual endeavors through which one earns the Guru’s grace. However, amongst all of these, association with the *Brahmasvarūpa*

⁵⁹⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/8, 2/1

⁵⁹⁵ Vac. Gadh. 3/18

⁵⁹⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/19

⁵⁹⁷ Vac. Loya 7

⁵⁹⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/54

⁵⁹⁹ SSSK 140

⁶⁰⁰ SSSK 141

⁶⁰¹ SSSK 142

⁶⁰² Vac. Kar. 10

⁶⁰³ Vac. Sar. 11

⁶⁰⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/29

⁶⁰⁵ Vac. Sar. 18

⁶⁰⁶ Vac. Gadh. 2/2

⁶⁰⁷ Vac. Gadh. 2/12

⁶⁰⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/61

⁶⁰⁹ Vac. Gadh. 2/7

⁶¹⁰ Vac. Gadh. 1/47

⁶¹¹ Vac. Gadh. 1/70

⁶¹² Vac. Gadh. 1/27

⁶¹³ Vac. Gadh. 1/6

Guru itself is truly the foremost endeavor.” Thus, here, we have discussed the virtues briefly to be attained by a devotee in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Vedānta.

12.3 Śraddhā (Patience, Faith)

Śraddhā means the doubt-free state of mind while walking towards the ultimate goal of life according to the guidance of the Guru. It is the powerful belief or faith in the words of the Guru. It produces patience and perseverance in the path of goal-accomplishment. A devotee with *śraddhā* does not back out half-way. He fights the battle till his last breath.⁶¹⁴ In this way, when *śraddhā* (faith) is combined with total trust in the words of the Guru (*parāma-ekāntika-satpuruṣa*) and Parabrahman, a seeker becomes free from all sins and bondage causing deeds (*tāmasa-karma*), his *vāsanās* (transmigrating desires and passions) get perished, and he experiences moral inclinations and dutifulness worthy of *sat-yuga* in his heart.⁶¹⁵ The seeker of faith successfully receives the right knowledge, while a faithless doubter ruins oneself. We can conclude the glory of *śraddhā* (faith) with the famous *Gītā* verse:

श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।

ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परं शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥⁶¹⁶

“The one who has faith in Parabrahman is sincere in *sāadhanā*, and has control over the senses gains this knowledge. Having gained this knowledge, one soon attains the supreme peace.”

12.4 Śravaṇādi-Sopānas (Steps for Grasping Knowledge)

We examined that in *satsaṅga*, one has to listen to the spiritual discourses with keen interest. Since it is a critical factor to attain knowledge, why? Well, when a thing is learned or perceived with rapt attention and concentration, its apprehension becomes so vivid and complete that the idea (image/ picture) of the thing gets firmly

⁶¹⁴ Vac. Sar. 5, 9

⁶¹⁵ Vac. Sar. 18

⁶¹⁶ BG 4/39

imprinted on the mind, and it can be recalled unmistakably any moment in the future, and whenever recalled, it occurs as it is its Spatio-temporal order and details.⁶¹⁷ Therefore, listening prudently with gripped attention is called *śravaṇa*. From whatever is listened, when one retains the relevant and deletes the irrelevant and thinks of it mentally, it is called *manana*. It involves the use of the sense of discrimination and activity of the mind to retain it. When, what is resolutely known by the mind, is reflected upon and remembered often and again through regular practice, it is called *nididhyāsana*. Furthermore, when it is recalled and remembered instantaneously as it is, unfailing with all details, it is called *sākṣātkāra*. It is an act of realization of truth in its entirety.⁶¹⁸

This process of *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*, and *sākṣātkāra* is used for realizing *ātman* (*ātma-sākṣātkāra*) and for realizing Paramātmān (*Parāmātmā-sākṣātkāra*). The *Upaniṣad* states: ‘आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः’ (BU 2/4/5) “One must listen to his glory, then contemplate upon Him, imbibe the appropriate thoughts that one has heard and contemplated.” Bhadreśadāsa comments on this verse that if one does *śravaṇa*, *manana*, and *nididhyāsana* in this way, one attains *sākṣātkāra*- realization.⁶¹⁹

12.5 Viveka (Discernment)

In the spiritual path, one requires to know what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. The sense of knowing the difference between the both is *viveka*. *Viveka* means the sense of discrimination needed for the purpose of spiritual self-ascent. It refers to the adeptness of discriminating between real and unreal, eternal and transient. *Viveka* consists in knowing oneself as *ātman* distinct from mind, ego, vital breath etc. It consists of knowing oneself as the eternal, immortal *ātman*, the

⁶¹⁷ Vac. Sar. 2

⁶¹⁸ Vac. Sar. 3

⁶¹⁹ BUSB 2/4/5, p.125

servile devotee of Parabrahman, as against the body and mind that are changing and perishable.⁶²⁰ Bhadresādāsa also adds that one must discern the distinction between Brahman and Parabrahman. He calls it “विवेकः”⁶²¹

12.6 *Gunagrāhaka-Dr̥ṣṭi* (Perceiving Virtues of Others)

In the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition, the most effective *sāadhanā* to flourish one's *satsaṅga* is *gunagrāhaka-dr̥ṣṭi* (perceiving virtues of others).⁶²² A devotee should always perceive well in others, to enrich oneself, and he always endeavors to find out one's own faults and vices to get rid of them. He thus is described as '*viveki*', i.e., a person who is judicious and prudent. He keeps on advancing promisingly in the path of perfection (spiritual self-ascent). Therefore, one ought to see the good in the devotees of Parabrahman. Moreover, when the Guru or the preacher-*sādhū* points out his faults and vices, he feels happy and obliged. He thanks him and appreciates his corrective gesture, and accordingly mends his conduct to perfect the personality.⁶²³ Bhadresādāsa writes: “कस्यापि दुर्गुणस्य वार्ता कदापि अन्य समक्षं नैव कार्या। भक्तदोषदर्शनं तत्कीर्तनादिकं विषयानामार्ग एवेति योगिमहाराजः।” (SSS p.366) “One should never speak ill words of others. To perceive and speak about others faults is like to drink poison; this was the principle of Yogiji Maharaja.” Thus, the *Guruparampara* always promoted this *sāadhanā* in the tradition.

12.7 *Antardr̥ṣṭi* (Introspection)

A devotee has to examine his progress in the *Satsang* fellowship. Introspection is the examination of one's own conscious thinking and feelings. In psychology, the process of introspection relies exclusively on observation of one's mental state, while in a spiritual context, it may refer to the examination of one's *ātman*. Introspection is closely related to human self-reflection and self-discovery and is

⁶²⁰ Vac. Sar. 4

⁶²¹ IUSB 1, p.2

⁶²² Satsangadiksha 168, 233

⁶²³ Vac. Gadh. 1/6

contrasted with external observation. Introspection generally provides privileged access to one's own mental states, not mediated by other sources of knowledge, so that individual experience of the mind is unique. One should think in the introspection process as Mahant Svāmi explains, “With a composed mind, one should introspect every day: “What have I come to accomplish in this world and what am I doing?”⁶²⁴ Svāminārāyaṇa provides another definition too: *antardṛṣṭi* (inner-vision/) consists in keeping the eyes fixed on the incarnate Parabrahman perceptibly present before the seeker. Focusing of the mind on the form of Parabrahman visible inside the heart or out there in front is called *antardṛṣṭi*.⁶²⁵

12.8 *Divyabhāva* (Divinity)

All the actions of Bhagavān and His *sādhū* are divine and pure. When Parabrahman incarnates on earth, he does some actions which are seen as doubtful, but these all incidents are generated through his master plan. However, we may understand or not; these are all correct and divine. Besides this, these actions and incidents are for our liberation.⁶²⁶ Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “However, when Parabrahman Bhagavān, who transcends both the perishable and the imperishable, assumes a human form... His actions are just like those of all humans... but they are all for the liberation of the *jīvas*. So, a true devotee sings the divine actions of Parabrahman and attains the highest elevated state of enlightenment, whereas a non-believer perceives faults in them.” (Vac. 1/72, p.177)

Bhadreśadāsa confirms by saying that परमदिव्यभावनरसितप्रत्यक्षपरमात्मैकान्तिकभिवाञ्छा (BSSB 1/1/1, p.3) “A seeker wants only the manifest form of Parabrahman with profound divinity towards Him.” The substances that are basically insentient cannot impure Parabrahman; instead, Parabrahman overlaps them with his eternal divinity. He says

⁶²⁴ *Satsangadiksha* 145

⁶²⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/49,

⁶²⁶ *Satsangadiksha* 131

further “स्वकीयदिव्यभावेन तानेव लेपयतीत्यर्थः” (BSSB 3/2/14, p.294). In this manner, *divyabhāva* is the most prominent endeavor in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. Conversely, *manuṣyabhāva*, to perceive faults in Parabrahman or the Guru, is the worst drawback in a devotee’s life.

12.9 *Niṣkapaṭabhāva* (Undeceptfulness)

The word ‘*niṣkapaṭa*’ is used in its technical sense in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* way to Parabrahman to imply an ingenious trait of the mind while doing *satsaṅga*. More simply, the word ‘*niṣkapaṭa*’ means ‘frank and open’, but in its specific sense, it also includes unhiding, unreserved, unhypocritical, undeceptive approach before the Guru (the *Parama ekāntika sādhu*). A *niṣkapaṭa bhakta* frankly admits and confesses his vices and shortcomings before his Guru who is perfect in the observance of his fivefold vows (*pañca-vartamān*), is free of vices and has the resolute knowledge and conviction of Parabrahman's transcendental greatness.

The disciple confides and confesses his failures and slips (lapses) in his observance of norms of tradition. He frankly confesses and admits the faults and vices he keeps seeing in Parabrahman and His devotees. He openly admits all the obstacles and problems that are upsetting him in his perception of (manifest-*pratyakṣa*) Parabrahman. Any act of mistaking Parabrahman as lesser than divine should be confidently confessed before the Guru. Bhadreśādāsa explains: “तथा हि श्रेयोभिलाषी गुरुं प्राप्य स्फुटं तत्पुनः तद्वर्षितादर्शितस्वदोषोद्धाटनेन कपटमपाकुरुते” (BGSB 2/7, p.22) “A disciple who wants to liberate should reveal and accept all his faults after attaining the Guru. Consequently, he removes his deceitful nature.” The improvement and atonement in the conduct according to the counsels, advices, corrections, expiations, and atonements suggested by the Guru remove all faults from the disciple and make his spiritual journey safer, swifter, and quicker.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁷ Vac. Loya 5

12.10 Prayer

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to Parabrahman or the requesting of good things from Parabrahman. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. Svāminārāyaṇa also speaks about the importance of prayer: Devotees should pray: “Protect us from *māyā* in the form of I-ness and my-ness, and may the love burgeoning within us for you. May we also have the company of the *Santa* who has transcended *māyā* and has affection for you; and may we acquire affection and a sense of my-ness towards him as well.” Bhadreśādāsa also provokes the importance of prayer in his comments on the IU. He states elusively that the true and best way of attaining the ultimate goal, Brahman and Parabrahman, is through prayer. Prayer is the humble voice of surrender.⁶²⁸ While offering prayer, one can think of the glory and greatness of Parabrahman. Everything else which is the production of *māyā* is perishable. One should ponder upon His power of all doer and at the same time, one should think that He is the Parabrahman, whom I have attained and I want to please only Him in this life.⁶²⁹

13. Conclusion

Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and his *Gunātīta Sādhus* have lived and taught a unique and practical path of spiritual *sāadhanā* that leads to the realization of *ātman*, Brahman and Paramātman. *Svāminārāyaṇa sāadhanā* provides a detailed description of the importance of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru by which all aspirants can succeed in their spiritual quest and experience the ultimate bliss of Parabrahman. When we analyze any traditional *sāadhanā*, especially the spiritual endeavor, it is God-centric.

Any spiritual endeavor, be it in Indian tradition or in the western tradition, possesses its unique qualities. I have tried to cover the broad, cumbersome, and exceptionally

⁶²⁸ IUSB 15, p.23

⁶²⁹ *Satsangadiksha* 147-151

complex topic in a few pages. We must content ourselves with the upper mentioned sections, wherein we discussed important points of Svāminārāyaṇa the tradition. But these all points are capable of explaining the Svāminārāyaṇa *sādhanā* on the base of the *Prasthānatrayī*. In short, we can say that this *sādhanā* process is unique among the various schools of Vedānta.

CHAPTER - 5

ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF SOTERIOLOGY

Soteriology is the study of the salvation⁶³⁰ of humanity. In Indian philosophy, soteriology can be defined as attaining *mokṣa* (Sanskrit: मोक्ष:- मोक्ष् घञ्, *mokṣa* “liberation”) or *mukti* (Sanskrit: मुक्ति:- मुच् क्तिन् “release”), which is defined as the liberation from *māyā* (*saṃsāra*, the cycle of death and rebirth).⁶³¹ “The principle of liberation is one of the distinguishing features of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. It is variously referred to as *mukti*, *mokṣa*, *kaivalya* and *nirvāṇa* in the scriptures. *Mukti* means freedom from bondage. *Mokṣa* means the destruction of delusion. *Kaivalya* means aloneness arising from the destruction of all bonds, and *nirvāṇa* means entering into a stateless state of immutability and non-becoming.”⁶³²

In Indian philosophy, Vedic tradition, culture, and heritage, *mokṣa* is concerned with the individual’s blissful, spiritual and moral life. Indian philosophy explains the way by which the continuous experience of sorrows and suffering can be entirely overcome. “Indian philosophers have applied a realistic and practical approach to solve the problems of life and reality. All the Indian schools of Philosophy, (except the Cārvākas and the Buddha) accept the self or *ātman* as eternal, pure, and free. Due to ignorance, the self identifies itself with the body and undergoes various sufferings in which the cycle of death and birth is the topmost suffering. Due to the knowledge of Parabrahman, the self becomes liberated.”⁶³³

⁶³⁰ Definition of salvation: Oxford, "The saving of the self; the deliverance from sin and its consequences", 1989

⁶³¹ Āpte Vāmana Śivarāma, *Samskṛta-Hindī Śabdakośa*, Shri Prakashan, Encyclopedia Britannica, Delhi, p.880

⁶³² Olivelle, Patrick, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p.162

⁶³³ E. Deutsch, *The self in Advaita Vedanta*, in Roy Perrett, Ed., *Indian philosophy: metaphysics*, Vol -3, pp.343–360

1. The Threefold Pains

Worldly life is full of sorrows and sufferings. We daily pray to Parabrahman to prevent us from these three kinds of pains in our rites and rituals. “आध्यात्मिक-आधिभौतिक-आधिदैविक-त्रिविधताप-उपशमन-अर्थम्”⁶³⁴ Generally, we suffer from these threefold miseries: (1) *ādhyātmika* (intrinsic), (2) *ādhibhautika* (extrinsic), and (3) *ādhidaivika* (superhuman). The first *ādhyātmika* is mental agitation caused by emotions and passions. The second type of pain i.e. *ādhibhautika* is caused by beasts, men, birds, alligators, reptiles, deer, etc. *ādhibhautika* pain is triggered by fourfold living beings, viz., *jarāyuja* (viviparous), *aṇḍaja* (oviparous), *svedaaja* (born of sweat) and *udbhija* (born of soil). The third type of pain is produced by supernatural agencies, like demons, ghosts, and planets. It is also caused by the elements of storm, rain, heat, cold, thunderbolt, etc. There are, in fact, many pleasures of life. Nevertheless, many more are the pains and sufferings of life and all living beings are subject to them. The pleasures are momentary, but the pains are permanent. Though it is possible for any individual being to avoid all pains, yet it is not possible for them to avoid decay and death. The *Gītā* insists in order to eradicate the threefold miseries of a spiritual seeker and bringing happiness in life.

प्रसादे सर्वदुःखानां हानिरस्योपजायते ।

प्रसन्नचेतसो ह्याशु बुद्धिः पर्यवतिष्ठते ॥ BG 2/65॥

“The effects of having won the grace or serenity (*prasādam*) of the *brahmasvarūp* Guru, Kṛṣṇā says that all kinds of sorrows viz. *ādhyātmika*, *ādhidaivika*, and *ādhibhautika*, are annihilated in the seeker when he gets *prasādam*. Further, the seeker with a *prasanna citta* i.e. purified *antaḥ-kāraṇa* gets firmly established and retains steady *buddhi* in all circumstances, just like space. The basic idea for happiness that the *buddhi* becomes immutable by (being established in) the form of *ātman*.” All the schools of the Indian Vedāntic system have also agreed that there are sorrows and sufferings in human life. That is why they put much emphasis on

⁶³⁴ Śrutiprakāśadāsa Sādhu, *Śrī Mahāpūjā, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabd, May 2011, p.5

developing a configure or constructing a procedure by which human beings can completely overcome suffering and sorrows. According to them, the sufferings and sorrows of men are due to ignorance or *avidyā* regarding the self. Ignorance is the leading cause of all sufferings and sorrows. It is accepted by all the schools that man can conquer ignorance and attain total freedom. Total freedom is asserted in Indian philosophy as *mokṣa* or liberation.⁶³⁵ As Rādhākṛṣṇana says, “Spiritual experience is the foundation of India's rich cultural history.”⁶³⁶ This statement indicates that philosophy and studies of spiritual texts should result in a blissful experience.

In its broad meaning, Indian philosophy discovers, “liberation means freedom from all ties, desires, holds, limitations, and death. Although we may think that we are free and live in a free world, physically and mentally, we are subject to many limitations and tied relationships, which do not let us live our lives freely or experience the freedom of liberated souls.” Freedom from worldly misery is the most important thing in emancipation. “Many imperceptible chains hold us in the colossal jail of the world. Everyone who lives here is a prisoner of their own thoughts and actions. Our fears, anxieties, feelings, emotions, thoughts, cares, concerns, desires, relationships, goals, and natural limitations hold us back. They come in the way of our ability and our happiness to live freely and blissfully. They keep us restricted to our little worlds.” Therefore, dharmic bondage is not really bondage but the means to liberation. “To achieve liberation, we have to break through the walls that separate us from the ultimate bliss. We have to conquer everything that holds us back or holds us in chains. How can there be freedom if we are conditioned to live like slaves to our own fears and desires? To be free from the bonds of the earth, we have to learn to live freely, both mentally and physically.”⁶³⁷

⁶³⁵ Brahmadarśanadāsa Sādhū, *Bhāratīya Darśanonī Rūparekhā-1, Svāminārāyaṇa Akṣarapīṭha*, Ahmedabad, 2007,

⁶³⁶ Indian Philosophy-1, p.41

⁶³⁷ Indian Philosophy-1, p.237

In this short discussion, I want to focus on some analysis of the philosophical explanation of the concept of *mokṣa* from an ethical and practical point of view.

2. The General Conception of *Mokṣa*

The state of *mokṣa* is not a particular thing that can be seen with our own eyes. Usually, people think that it is a state which is attained after death. Again, no one can describe the state which is attainable after death. The question always remains that what happens when one attains *mokṣa* or liberation. Certain possibilities exist for each individual *ātman*, upon attaining liberation.

1. The seeker experience oneness with the ultimate reality.
2. The person realizes his own self and Parabrahman while living in this world.
3. The individual secures a place in heaven to enjoy the pleasures of heavenly life. If they indulged in righteous actions and acquired merit during its existence upon earth.
4. The self goes to hell to suffer significantly as a part of its purification and penitentiary correction if it deviated from the path of righteousness and indulged in sinful actions.
5. The self goes neither to heaven nor to hell. Instead, it remains in an intermediary state of limbo in the middle atmospheric region as a ghost or a spirit because of some peculiar circumstances.
6. The self attains eternal liberation if it has managed through spiritual practice and past life actions to rid itself of all *kāma* and impurities. It enters the highest abode of Brahman and remains there for eternity in the presence of Parabrahman, the Universal Supreme Being.

Of these, which is considered temporary liberation and which is permanent? What is the connection between the individual's *kārma* and liberation? Having exhausted the merit or demerit of their previous *kārmās* in these worlds, do the individual *ātman* return to earth to take another birth as mortal beings and continue their existence? If those who achieve liberation never return to earth, then what happens

to them when they achieve liberation? How do they exist and in what state? What will be the relation between the individual self and Parabrahman? This is all indeed our research in this chapter.

3. The Ultimate Goal

The scriptures echo: “धर्मार्थकाममोक्षाख्यं पुरुषार्थचतुष्टयम्”⁶³⁸ “The four goals or aims of human life which is known as *puruṣārtha* in Indian philosophy are as follows: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa* (liberation).” *Mokṣa* is one of the four goals or aims of human life. In the field of Indian culture and heritage, *dharma* is explained and placed first because it is considered superior to *artha* and *kāma*. *Dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* are too much linked with man’s social life but *mokṣa* is concerned with individuals’ spiritual or moral life. Moreover, it is the ultimate goal.⁶³⁹ With reference to the *Bhagavad-Gītā* it can be said that those who have desires for *artha* and *kāma* may follow the *karmakāṇḍa* without remembering Parabrahman to obtain their desired object, whereas those who are totally free from such desires and aim at *mokṣa*, they may follow *jñāna* and remember Parabrahman. The BG expresses the first group:

कामात्मानः स्वर्गपरा जन्मकर्मफलप्रदाम् ।

क्रियाविशेषबहुलां भोगैश्वर्यगतिं प्रति ॥⁶⁴⁰(BG 2/43)

“They are dominated by material cravings and consider going to heaven as the highest goal of life. They indulge in specific rituals for the sake of material prosperity and enjoyment. Rebirth is the result of their action.” Those who are full of material longings perform various specific rituals for the attainment of pleasure and power and think to go to heaven as the highest goal of life. The rebirth is the fruit of such rituals. On the other hand, with the knowledge of Brahman, a person

⁶³⁸ *Skandapurāṇa*/ 4 *kāśīkhaṇḍa* /71/15

⁶³⁹ Gavin Flood, The meaning and context of the *Puruṣārtha*, in Julius Lipner (Editor) - The Fruits of Our Desiring, 1996, pp 16–21

⁶⁴⁰ BG 2/43

despite having committed extreme sins attains liberation. The BG explicitly mentions:

अपि चेदसि पापेभ्यः सर्वेभ्यः पापकृत्तमः ।

सर्वं ज्ञानप्लवेनैव वृजिनं सन्तरिष्यसि ॥⁶⁴¹ (BG 4/36)

“Even if one is the most sinful of all sinners, yet one shall easily cross over the river of sin with the help of the raft of the knowledge of Parabrahman.” The lives of personal beings proceed within this global framework from birth to adulthood, old age, death, and rebirth in a never-ending round of *sāṃsārika* existences. During the cosmic night, they subsist in a kind of limbo or oblivion. The concept of *dharma* also refers to the timeless and absolute reality beyond the manifested one; it helps to attain the final goal of religious and philosophical quest equated with the ultimate truth. “This truth is eternal, outside time, and independent of the changeable phases of the phenomenal reality manifested within time. The manifestation of the eternal truth or law within the universe dominated by time does not make the world everlasting in the sense of a lineal duration, but provides for its cyclic nature, its recurring rise and fall.”⁶⁴²

4. Mukti Mimāṃsā in the Svāminārāyaṇa School

The ultimate aim of human life is to transcend *māyā* and attain *mukti*- freedom from the cycle of births and deaths. By leading a spiritually pure life based on the path revealed by Svāminārāyaṇa, such *mukti* or *mokṣa* is attained. Within the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana*, devotees have a relationship with Akṣara and Puruṣottama in the *sādhana-dāśā* and also after attaining *mukti*. *Mukti* is defined as becoming *akṣararūpa* and offering *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dāsabhāva*. Thus, even in the state of *mukti*, one, upon becoming *brahmarūpa*, continuously offers *upāsanā* to Puruṣottama with *dāsabhāva*. To become *akṣararūpa* or *brahmarūpa* is to attain *brahmabhāva* or qualitative oneness with Brahman. By attaining *brahmabhāva*, one

⁶⁴¹ BG 4/36

⁶⁴² Alban Widgery, *The Principles of Hindū Ethics*, International Journal of Ethics, 1930, pp. 239–240

acquires all of the attributes necessary for liberation. When a devotee achieves *brahmabhāva*, they are redeemed from *māyā*, become *gunātita* (rise beyond the three *māyic* attributes), and become faultless. This *brahmarūpa* devotee is then forever engrossed in unhindered *bhakti* towards Puruṣottama and experiences Parabrahman's supreme bliss. Svāminārāyaṇa acknowledges in the *Vacanāmṛta*: "After abandoning their association, the *jīva* realizes, 'My self is Brahman, which is transcendental and uncontrolled by *māyā*.' If one associates with Brahman through incessant contemplation in this manner, the *jīva* acquires the virtues of that Brahman." (Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p.460)

Svāminārāyaṇa goes further: "Only when one incessantly acquaintances with one's inspirer, Brahman, through contemplation - as previously described - is that attachment broken." Thus, he clearly mentions the unique procedure of *mukti* in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. *Mukti Mimāṃsā* refers to deep reflection on or inquiry into liberation. This usually involves deep reflection on the forms of bondage and liberation and the means to liberation. The concept of liberation presupposes someone's state of bondage and anticipates the possibility of his or her release into a state of freedom. From the *Svāminārāyaṇa* philosophical perspective, bondage marks the term *saṃsāra* or *māyā* and understood as a beginningless process of life of beings who are born, die, and are continually reborn. This process is governed by the eternal law of Parabrahman.

Of the five eternal *tattvas* (Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *īśvara*, *jīva*, and *māyā*) accepted by Svāminārāyaṇa, Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman are always beyond *māyā*. They have been, are and forever will be beyond any type of bondage. *Māyā* is not able to influence or bind them. In fact, even the attachment that the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* have to *māyā*, perish due to their association with them (Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman). Since *māyā* is *jaḍa* and the binding factor, the question of its bondage or liberation does not arise; consequently, the remaining two entities, *jīvas*

and *īśvaras* are subject to bound by *māyā*. There may be hardly any questions that arise regarding the *jīva*'s bondage. However, *īśvara*'s bondage is a unique feature of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School: *Svāminārāyaṇa* elucidates that it is when Virāt-Puruṣa worships Vāsudeva Bhagavān, who is *nirguṇa*, that he forsakes *māyā* and becomes *brahmarūpa* and attains liberation. *Svāminārāyaṇa* explains: “This is because his father, Puruṣa is mighty and cares for him properly. So, because Virāt-Puruṣa is attached to *māyā*, he is again produced from *māyā* at the end of dissolution. Moreover, just as the *jīva* is bound and powerless, in the same way, its father is also bound and powerless. How, then, can the father help his son?”

Let us understand it thoroughly. We have studied in the previous chapters that Virāt-Puruṣa is in the *īśvara* category. *Svāminārāyaṇa*, after applying the analogy for *jīva* and *īśvara* as son and father, argues that they both are in the clutch of *māyā* and they have to tread the path of spiritual endeavor in order to get liberation. Bhadrēśadāsa also confirms the fact:

जीवानामीश्वराणां च ह्यनादिबन्धनं दृढम्॥

जनिमृतिप्रवाहान्तःपातित्वमादिशून्यकम् ॥ SSSK 431॥

“*Jīvas* and *īśvaras* are in the firm bondage of *māyā* since time immemorial; this causes them to involve in the beginning less cycle of birth and death.” The IUSB states the bondage of these two entities; while explaining the verse “ये के चात्महनो जनाः” Bhadrēśadāsa expresses: “जायन्ते जनिमृतिप्रवाहे संसरन्ति ते जना बद्धा जीवेश्वराः।” (IUSB 3, p.11) “*Jīvas* and *īśvaras* are bound by *māyā*; therefore, are subject to fall in the cycle of death and birth.” In terms of their fundamental nature, these two *tattvas* are pure, knowledgeable, liberated, and characterized by eternal existence, consciousness, and bliss. Yet despite this, they are having been bound to ignorance in the form of *māyā* since time eternal. As long as they have this captivity, they do not experience the purity of their form and remain a part of the creation, sustenance and destruction of the world. This is their very attachment. The bondage of both these *tattvas* in this manner is a reality. Albeit this attachment in the form of ignorance is real, it is

unable to bring about any defects in their essentially pure form. When both of these *tattvas* become liberated from this bondage, they experience their pure *brāhmic* form, as well as the form of Parabrahman residing within them. Ultimately, there is a permanent end to their various forms of suffering and misery; they attain *mukti* (liberation) from the cycles of birth and death and a permanent place in the presence of Parabrahman in his Akṣaradhāma, amongst the *Akṣara-muktas*.

The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates this fact while commenting on the KeU verse “अमृता भवन्ति” (KeU 1/2). Here, the *Upaniṣad* commences the subject of Parabrahman’s all doership, and *mukti* is also asserted as the result of knowing Parabrahman as the all doer. Bhadrēśadāsa provokes: “ब्रह्मरूपेण स्वात्मना सर्वत्र साक्षात्परमानदानुभवरूपां मोक्षस्थितिमनुभवति” (KeUSB 1/2, p.35) “By acquiring this *brāhmīsthiti* (*brahmabhāva*) one attains liberation and experiences Parabrahman’s bliss directly.”

The SSS defines *mukti* as:

मुक्तिर्हि स्वात्मब्रह्मैक्य-पूर्वकं दासभावतः।

भजनोपासनं प्रीत्या स्वामिनारायणप्रभोः॥ SSSK 427॥

“*Mukti* is identifying one’s *ātman* with Akṣarabrahman and humbly and lovingly worshipping Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa.” Bhadrēśadāsa gives the definition of *mukti* in which he includes every aspect of the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana as far as *mukti* or *śreya* is concerned. He defines: “भायागन्धविवर्जितत्वाद् दिव्यवस्तुप्रापकत्वाच्च निर्दोषो दिव्यश्चात्मनो ह्यात्यन्तिकदुःखनिवृत्तिपूर्वकं परमात्मसहजानन्दपरमसुखं प्रदत्वेन अत्यन्तहितकरत्वात् प्रशस्तः साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुहरिप्रसंगमात्रजन्यो ह्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसिद्धान्तलक्षणो ब्रह्मविद्याध्यात्मविद्यापरविद्यादिसमार्थशब्दैः श्रुतिस्मृत्यादिसुप्रतिष्ठितः संदर्शितश्च परमनिःश्रेयसपथः एव श्रेयः।” (KUSB 2/1, p.85) “*Mukti* or liberation or *śreya* can be attained only by the association of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru. This state is faultless and divine. In that *śreya*, the ultimate sorrow (cycle of death and birth) is uprooted, Parabrahman’s bliss is granted and no trace of *māyā* remains there. Moreover, it is the very essence of Akṣara Puruṣottama principle, which is

well established in the *śrutis* and *smṛtis* by the name as *brahmavidyā*, *adhyātmavidyā*, and *parāvidyā*, etc.”

The BSSB also elaborates: “एवं जगतो निर्वेदं प्राप्य ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुमाश्रित्य तत्प्रसङ्गेन स्वात्मानं मायामलहीनं परिशुद्धं कृत्वा तमेव स्वात्मानं पुनस्तदक्षरब्रह्मभावेन संस्कृत्य गुरारेव प्रत्यक्षनारायनस्वरूपभावनयाक्षराधिपतिसहजानन्द-परमोपासनेन तत्परमानन्ददिव्यानुभूति लक्षणं मोक्षं संपादयेत इति” (BSSB 1/1/4, p.28) Here, the Bhāṣyakāra explains the method and state of liberation a seeker achieves through the Akṣarabrahman Guru. “After attaining detachment towards the worldly affairs, one associates with the *brahmasvarūpa* Guru by seeking his firm refuge, acquires pure *ātma*-realization. Thereafter he adds *brahmabhāva* in that *ātma*-realization. In this way, he further indulges in *upāsanā* of the manifest form of Parabrahman; as a result, he procures liberation in which he experiences the bliss of Parabrahman.” The BG shows the way to eradicate the internal desire which emerges due to *māyā*.

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।

रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥⁶⁴³

“The pleasurable objects stay away if one abstains from sense enjoyment, but the thirst for sense enjoyment remains in subtle form. The thirst also disappears from the one who has known the Supreme Parabrahman.”

Bhadreśadāsa explains the very sense of this verse: “अक्षरपुरुषोत्तमसाक्षात्कारस्य ब्रह्मविद्यात्मकस्य ब्रह्मस्थितिरूपत्वान्नाल्लब्धाक्षरब्रह्मगुणसाधर्म्यस्य पुरुषोत्तमपरब्रह्मोपासकस्य ध्रुवापुनरावृत्तिशीला मायामोहनिवृत्तिरभिजायता” (BSSB 2/59, p.61) “One who has attained qualitative oneness with Akṣarabrahman, has acquired *brahmavidyā* and has attained the realization of Akṣara Puruṣottama, for such a devotee *māyā* and infatuation are removed permanently.” Having understood the bondage and liberation of the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* in its simplest form, we shall now primarily focus on the attachment and liberation of the *jīva*.

⁶⁴³ BG 2/59

4.1 The Nature of Bondage

The *Vacanāmṛta* teaches us that by its essential nature and form, the *jīva* is pure (Vac. Sār.1, Loyā. 10), and without any defects (Vac. Gadh. 1/64, Loyā. 10) from the influence of *māyā* (Vac. Sār. 9, Gadh. 2/57), beyond the three *guṇas* (Vac. Sār. 9), and *brahmarūpa* (Vac. Gadh. 1/77, Loyā. 10, Gadh. 2/8). Yet, the *jīva* is innately bound to its causal body in the form of ignorance and *māyā*. Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “The *kāraṇa* (causal) body is the *māyā* of the *jīva*. That same *kāraṇa* body develops into the *sthūla* and *sūkṣma* bodies. Therefore, all three - the *sthūla*, *sūkṣma* and *kāraṇa* bodies - can be said to be the *māyā* of the *jīva*. In the same manner, *virāt*, *śūtrātman* and *avyakta* can be said to be the *māyā* of *īśvaras*.” (Vac. Kār. 12, p.275)

Svāminārāyaṇa further explains that these three bodies of *jīva* and *īśvaras* cause the tight bondage. “This *māyā* of the *jīva*, i.e., the *kāraṇa* body, is enclosed so strongly to the *jīva* that they cannot be split by any means whatsoever.” (Vac. Kār. 12, P.275) In fact, the fundamental reason for the *jīva* to be bound in this manner is its *kāraṇa*-causal--body. Since the *kāraṇa* body is real, the bondage of the *jīva* is also real. In the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana,

बन्धः सत्यस्तथा मुक्तिः सर्वजीवेश्वराऽऽत्मनाम्।

अनाद्यज्ञानतो बद्धाः साधनान्मुक्तिमाप्नुयुः ॥⁶⁴⁴

“The bondage and liberation of *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are real. They are bound by eternal ignorance and will be liberated through the spiritual endeavor.” In reality, the elemental form and nature of the *jīva* is totally detached and distinct from the *sthūla*, *sūkṣma* and *kāraṇa* (gross, subtle, and causal). Despite this, due to ignorance, the *jīva* believes that the deficiencies, traits, and natures of these three bodies are a part of its essential original form. This ignorance is due to not having the knowledge of its own pure form, which is characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and

⁶⁴⁴ SSSK 426

bliss (Gadh. 1/20). Due to this lack of knowledge of its pure form, the *jīva* identifies itself with the nature of the *kāraṇa* body and other bodies to which it becomes firmly attached and believes this to be its real form instead (Gadh. 1/44, Gadh. 2/2). Believing oneself to be the body and attachment towards one's body is itself the root cause of all defects (Loyā. 6). This is the prominent reason for one's pain and misery in this life and thereafter. The BU provokes this matter:

अनन्दा नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसाऽऽवृताः

तान्स्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्त्य् विद्वासोऽबुधो जनाः ॥ BU 4/4/11 ॥

“There are indeed those unblessed worlds, covered with blind darkness. Those who are ignorant and not enlightened go after death to those worlds.” Bhadreśadāsa explains it while commenting on this verse: “ब्रह्मविद्याविरहिता ये जनास्ते सर्वेऽपि अनन्दा नाम तदाख्या आनन्दघनविधुराः अन्धेन तमसावृताः गाढमायान्धकाराविष्टाः ते ये दुःखैकलक्षणाः लोकास्तान् प्रेत्य मृत्वा अभि गच्छति अभितो मुहुर्मुहुर् गच्छति” (BUSB 4/4/11, p.276) “Those who have not attained *brahmavidyā* will invariably go to the realms which are sorrowful and covered with the blind and dense darkness of *māyā*.”

Here the Bhāṣyakāra explicitly mentions that *māyā* is the cause of bondage for an aspirant. In other words, this *māyā* binds the aspirant due to his attachment to his body. Bhadreśadāsa tactfully adds it in the IUSB while explaining ‘आत्महनो जनाः’ firstly, he launches the *pūrvapakṣa*’s question that if the *ātman* is immortal then how can it be destroyed? Bhadreśadāsa argues that because of the perpetual attachment of the three bodies an aspirant fails to realize his true self *atman*, with Brahman and Parabrahman. Due to this deficiency, he falls in the cycle of deaths and births. Consequently, it becomes a fundamental characteristic of bondage.

Bhadreśadāsa further explains it by quoting the *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* verse: ‘हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम्’ (IU 15) “Due to the golden vessel, the *sat* is hidden.” He elucidates that just as gold attracts and increases desire, so does *māyā*. That is why, here, *māyā*

has been called a golden vessel. The word *satya* implies *ātman*, Akṣarabrahman, and Parabrahman as they are the forms of truth. Therefore, true knowledge is hidden due to ignorance in the form of *māyā*. (IUSB 15, pp.22-23)

This ignorance, Svāminārāyaṇa identifies “is of the form of *māyā*. with the *ātman*’s causal body makes the connection even more clear. The *jīva* also holds the causal body, which is the embodiment of eternal ignorance.⁶⁴⁵ Connecting this ignorance back to *māyā*, defines *māyā* as nothing but the sense of I-ness towards the body and my-ness towards anything related to the body.”⁶⁴⁶(Vac. Kār.12)

To begin with, any actions performed while in a state of ignorance (i.e. self-identification with the bodies) accrue *kārmās* which are then stored in the causal body. These *kārmās* that the *jīva* has performed with such attachment during past lives have become integrated with the *jīva*. Just as fire enters iron and turns it into a fire-like entity, similarly these *kārmās* fully ripen, they cling to the *ātman*, as if becoming a part of it. The Bhāṣyakāra explains: “अनादित एव संचिततां प्राप्य जीवेश्वरात्मनुलिप्तानि कारणाव्याकृताख्यानाद्यविद्याशरीररूपाणि कर्माणि प्रलीनभावगतानि विद्यन्त एव तदनुगुणतया सृष्टिमुद्भाययति परमात्मा” (BSSB 2/1/36, p.186) “The storage of the *kārmās* in which the causal bodies of *jīvas* and *īśvaras* in the form of *avidyā* or *māyā* remain latent since time immemorial. Parabrahman creates the universe according to their *kārmās*.” Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “This *māyā* of the *jīva*, i.e. the causal body, is attached so firmly to the *jīva* that they cannot be separated by any means whatsoever... just as the shell of a tamarind seed is extremely firmly attached to the seed.” (Vac. Kār. 12, p.275) Those grown and matured *karmās* become the cause of the cycle of birth and death.

Therefore, desires {*vāsanā*}, born of ignorance, become the root cause of more and more lives in the perpetual transmigratory cycle. Due to *vāsanā* being born out of

⁶⁴⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/66

⁶⁴⁶ Vac. Gadh. 3/39

ignorance, the *jīva* roams in the cycle of 8.4 million life forms and experiences pain and pang. As long as the *māyā* that binds the *jīva* is not uprooted, the *jīva* has to take birth and die uncountable times. At the time of creation, the *jīvas* arise from within *māyā* (Gadh. 3/10), and at the time of dissolution, the *jīvas* are absorbed back into *māyā* along with their *kāraṇa* body (Gadh. 1/12).

Albeit, *māyā*/ignorance/the causal body still conceals the *ātman*, obstructing and objecting to a full realization of its conscious, pure, blissful self and of the limitlessly blissful Parabrahman who resides therein and all around. Instead, that ignorance holds the *ātman* captive to the body's never-ending needs and the voracious desires of the mind, entrapping it ever more into a transmigratory existence with all its limitations and sufferings of birth, decay, disease, disappointment, and death. As far as the bondage of *jīva* is concerned, the three *guṇas* of *māyā* also cause bondage for the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*. The BG mentions:

सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति गुणाः प्रकृतिसम्भवाः ।

निबध्नन्ति महाबाहो देहे देहिनमव्ययम् ॥⁶⁴⁷

“*Sattva* or goodness, *rajas* or activity, and *tamas* or inertia; these three *guṇas* (states, moods) of *māyā* bind the eternal self to the body.”

The Bhāṣyakāra elucidates: “सत्त्वं रजस्तम इति त्रयो गुणाः देहे त्रिगुणमयप्रकृतिकार्याब्धेस्मिन् शरीरेवस्थितं देहिनं देहात् स्वरूपतो विलक्षणमप्यनाद्यज्ञानाद् देहाध्यासवन्तमात्मानं निबध्नन्ति संसारबन्धनमापादयन्ति। देवमनुष्यादितत्तच्छरीरयोगमापादयन्ति इति भावः।” (BGSB 14/5, p.295) “Although this *māyic* body which is composed of three *guṇas*; *sattva*, *rajas* and *tama*, is distinct from the *ātman* yet, due to the constant association with the body, it becomes bound and subject to attain the various births as *deva*, human, etc.” The BG goes further and illustrates the matter one by one.⁶⁴⁸ In this manner, we discussed the nature of the bondage of

⁶⁴⁷ BG 14/5

⁶⁴⁸ “Of these, *Sattva*, being calm, is enlightening and ethical. It binds human beings (or *Jivātmā*) by attachment to happiness and knowledge. (BG 14/6) *Rajas* is characterized by intense selfish activity and is born of desire and

jīva, which is essential to understand the nature of liberation. This is what the Vedānta texts promise liberation from, and what aspirers of liberation (*mumukṣu*) earnestly endeavor towards.

4.2 The Nature of Liberation

Through the association of Parabrahman or the *Akṣarabrahman*- Guru the *Satpuruṣa* – who is the manifest form of Parabrahman on earth, the *jīva* overcomes the ignorance in the form of the *kāraṇa* body, to which it has been strongly attached since eternity. It also overcomes the resulting influences of *kārmās*, *vāsanā*, *svabhāva* and *prakṛti* (the forms of *māyā*), and thus the *jīva* is liberated. In this state, the *jīva* is able to experience its true form as being pure, knowledgeable liberated and characterized by eternal existence, consciousness and bliss. Svāminārāyaṇa illustrates: “The exclusive cause behind the *jīva* attaining liberation, transcending *māyā* and becoming *brahmarūpa* is its engagement in the *jnāna*, meditation, devotional songs, spiritual discourses, etc., of the manifest form of Bhagavān, who is Parabrahman. It is due to these that the *jīva* transgresses *māyā*, attains an extremely elevated state, and also attains Parabrahman’s Akṣaradhāma.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/32, p.463) In this way, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School explicitly propounds that for ultimate liberation one must become *brahmarūpa*. Svāminārāyaṇa states: “*Jīva* or *īśvara* becomes *brahmarūpa* and attains liberation.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/31, p.460)

The *jīva* also experiences its original form as being unchanging, beyond the three *guṇas* and *māyā*, as the form of knowledge, the form of bliss and as extremely lustrous. Knowledge, devotion, bliss, and such innumerable qualities - which were concealed by the barrier of ignorance - become manifest and are experienced (Vac.

attachment. It binds the *Jīva* by attachment to the fruits of work. (BG 14/7) *Tamas*, born of inertia, confuses *jīva*. It binds by ignorance, laziness, and excessive sleep.” (BG 14/8)

Sār. 18). It attains the *gunātita* state, transcending the three *guṇas*, three bodies and the emotions of the three bodies. Thus, through attachment to the manifest form of Brahman (*Gunātita Satpuruṣa*), the *jīva* becomes *brahmarūpa* and ultimately attains the realization of Parabrahman within its *atman*. In this way, through the removal of the causes of miseries, i.e. ignorance, bodily attachment, *vāsanā*, *svabhāva*, etc., the *jīvātman* is freed from all sufferings. Not only do all forms of suffering - mental, physical, and those of worldly dealings - end, but the *jīva* also attains release from the cycle of births and deaths. Further, by becoming *brahmarūpa* and attaining *brahmabhāva*, it also eternally receives the infinite and divine bliss of Parabrahman.

The important point highlighted by Svāminārāyaṇa about the form of liberation in the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is that it does not merely involve overcoming the three *guṇas*, bodies and states, and thus becoming free from all miseries; it also involves becoming *brahmarūpa*, realizing Paramātman and experiencing Paramātman's eternal bliss. In short, ultimate liberation is not only being eternally free from misery but also eternally enjoying ultimate bliss. More convincingly, The *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy defines *mukti* as a state of immortality, where death and rebirth are eliminated, because their very cause, *māyā* or ignorance, is no more. Svāminārāyaṇa enlightens: “Just like a grain of rice that has had its outer chaff separated does not grow, one who ... is freed from eternal ignorance in the form of *māyā* becomes free of birth and death.” (Vac. Sār. 11, p.227)

The approach used by the *Vacanāmṛta* is similar to that used in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya. Bhadreśadāsa proclaims: “अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन परिशुद्धात्मानमधिकृत्य प्रवर्तितो यः साक्षादब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरोयोगस्तत्प्रसङ्ग इतियावत्। तेन प्राप्तः परिशुद्धे स्वात्मन्यक्षरब्रह्मभावानुभवात्मको योऽधिको गमः शुद्धात्मविज्ञानादप्याधिक्येन प्राप्तं यद् ब्रह्मसाक्षात्कारात्मकं ज्ञानमितियावत् तेनेत्यर्थः । साक्षाद्ब्रह्मस्वरूपगरुप्रसङ्गेन स्वयमपि तत्साधर्म्यलक्षणं ब्रह्मरूपत्वं सम्पाद्येति तु पिण्डितार्थः। ततः किं करणीयमित्याह मत्वा ध्यात्वा ब्रह्मरूपेण स्वात्मना तं

परमात्मानमुपास्येत्यर्थः। ब्रह्मरूपत्वस्य परब्रह्मोपासनाऽधिकारहेतुत्वाद् अध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन मत्वेत्युक्तम्।(KUSB 2/12, pp. 96-97)

“The firm association with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru is called *adhyātmayoga*, through which one acquires the empirical experience of *Akṣarabrahmabhāva* in his pure *atman*, this is *adhigama*. This *brahmabhāva* or *Akṣarabrahmabhāva* is additional to, *ātmabhava* which is identified as brahman-revelation. It means that to attain the redemptive virtues from the association of Akṣarabrahman and become *brahmarūpa*. Thereafter one should indulge in the *upāsanā* of Parabrahman. Only a *brahmarūpa* devotee is eligible to offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman. That is why the *mantra* puts *adhyatmadhigamen* before *devam matva* (offering *upāsanā* to Parabrahman).”⁶⁴⁹

He adds further: “एवं विशिष्टोपासनमनुष्ठाय किं लभ्यत इति तत्फलमाह धीरः धीमत्त्वात् परमात्मरममाणत्वाच्च धैर्यसम्पन्नः पूर्वोक्तो ब्रह्मरूपो भक्तः हर्षशोकौ जहाति लौकिकविषयलाभाऽलाभादिद्वन्द्वसंजातानन्दोद्वेगादिलक्षणद्वन्द्वमुक्तो भवति” (KUSB 2/12, pp.96-97) “After offering such phenomenal *upāsanā*, what is attained? The answer is- the *brahmarūpa* devotee, becomes free of the dualities of worldly happiness and misery such as profit and loss, etc.”

The BG also confirms this fact:

गुणानेतानतीत्य त्रीन्देही देहसमुद्भवान् ।

जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैर्विमुक्तोऽमृतमश्नुते ॥⁶⁵⁰

“When one rises above the three *guṇas* that originate due to *māyā*; one is freed from birth, old age, disease, and death; and attains *mukti*.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments: “देही मुमुक्षुः देहसमुद्भवान् क्षेत्राऽऽकारप्रकृतिपरिणामभूतशरीरसम्भवान् एतान् प्रोक्तान् त्रीन् सत्त्वरजस्तमआख्यानं गुणान् अतीत्य नित्यगुणातीतब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुसमाश्रयणादिभिरतिक्रम्य गुणातीतभावं प्राप्य ब्रह्मभूतः सन् जन्ममृत्युजरादुःखैः

⁶⁴⁹ इत्थमिहाऽध्यात्मयोगाधिगमेन देवं मत्वेति पदत्रयेण देहत्रयादिविमुक्तशुद्धात्मस्वरूपविज्ञानं तादृशे परिशुद्धात्मनि च ब्रह्मरूपत्वाऽऽपादनं तदर्थं चाऽक्षरब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरोः साक्षाद्योगस्ततश्च पुरुषोत्तमपरब्रह्मोपासनमिति निर्णयचतुष्टयमुपदिष्टम्। (KU 2/12, pp.96-97). हर्षशोकाविति तूपलक्षणं सर्वविधमायिकदोषाणामतः सर्वमायिकदोषान् परित्यज्य त्रिगुणातीतः स इहैव ब्राह्मी स्थितिमनुभवतीति भावः

⁶⁵⁰ BG 14/20

त्रिगुणनिबन्धनैर्जन्ममृत्युजरादिसांसारिकक्लेशैः विमुक्तः सन् अमृतं मोक्षम् अश्नुते लभते॥” (BGSB 14/20, p.300) “An aspirant, by the company of the eternal *Gunātita* Guru, abjures the three *guṇas*; *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. These *guṇas* have emerged from the *māyic* body, which is the effect of *māyā*. In this manner, the aspirant infringes these three *guṇas*, becomes free from all bondage of deaths and births, and attains liberation.”

The BSSB also draws a conclusion by saying: “परमात्मप्राकट्यानुभावकं... ब्रह्म च प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्मस्वरूपगुरुरूपसत्या साक्षात्कृत्य मुमुक्षुरप्यनावृत्तिलक्षणमपवर्गं भजत इति” (BSSB 4/4/22, p.432) “Through the firm refuge of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru, who is the manifest form of Parabrahman on earth, a seeker attains permanent liberation.”⁶⁵¹ Therefore, it is clear that to attain *mokṣa* or Paramātmān, offering *upāsanā* to Him is indispensable. Thus, one who desires *mokṣa* must know Paramātmān. To become eligible to offer this *upāsanā*, one has to become *brahmarūpa* and therefore must know Akṣarabrahman. And to attain this state of being *brahmarūpa*, one has to know the *ātman*.⁶⁵²

Obviously, as we learned in the topics on *jīva* and *īśvara*, the *ātman* is by its very nature immortal and pure. However, liberation in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School is more than just a return to an original state of being for the *ātman*. It is a new, higher spiritual state - indeed, the highest, perfect spiritual state - that is enriched by the direct realization of Parabrahman. It is not just a release from the pain and limitations of transmigration but an eternal, overwhelming experience of the

⁶⁵¹ स्वात्मब्रह्मैक्येन यदुपासनबलाद् उपासकोऽपि 'एष एते तरति नैनं कृताकृते तपतः' - बृ.४/४/२२, 'एष नित्यो महिमा ब्राह्मणस्य न वर्धते कर्मणा नो कनीयान् तस्यैव स्यात् पदवित्तं विदित्वा न लिप्यते कर्मणा पापकेनेति' (बृ.४/४/२३), 'सर्वं पाप्मानं तरति' (बृ.४/४/२३), 'ये तद् विदुरमृतास्ते भवन्ति' (बृ.४/४/१४), "तं न कश्चन पाप्मा तरति" (छा.८/६/३), 'उदेति ह वै सर्वेभ्यः पाप्मभ्यो य एवं वेद' (छा.१/६/७), 'सर्वान्येनं वामान्यभिसंयन्ति य एवं वेद' - छा.४/१५/२, 'सर्वाणि वामानि नयति' - छा.४/१५/३, 'सर्वेषु लोकेषु भाति' (छा.४/१५/४, 'बुद्धियुक्तो जहातीह उभे सुकृतदुष्कृते' (गी.२/५०), 'इति मां योऽभिजानाति कर्मभिर्न स बध्यते' (गी.४/१४)

⁶⁵² This is explicitly and repeatedly corroborated by such important adjectives as '*amṛta*' {literally, 'immortal'} found to describe the liberated self in the *Upaniṣads* (IU 11, 14; KeU 1/2, 2/4, 2/5; KU 1/28, 6/2, 6/9, 6/14, 6/15; PU 1/10, 3/11, 3/12; MU 3/2/9; TU 1/10/1; AU 3/4; CU 1/4/4, 1/4/5; BU 1/3/28, 2/4/2, 2/4/3, 4/4/7, 4/4/14, 4/4/17, 4/5/4, 5/14/8) and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* (13/12, 14/20). We also learned in the chapter on Akṣarabrahman that Akṣaradhāma, the abode of Parabrahman where liberated selves eternally rest in communion with him, is a place from where there is no return to a transmigratory existence (Vac. Sār.14; CU 4/15/6, BU 6/2/15, BG 8/21, 15/6, BS 4/4/22).

limitless and unending bliss of Parabrahman. “It entails not merely the dispelling of ignorance but the positive receiving of Akṣarabrahman’s qualities. In other words, this is the pre-eminent *brāhmic* state, what Svāminārāyaṇa calls the state of being *brahmarūpa* or *akṣararūpa*, and described in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* as '*brāhmi sthiti*' (2/72) or being '*brahmabhūtaḥ*'” (BG 18/54). In this state, the liberated *ātma* becomes like Brahman'; that is, it receives many of the necessary qualities for the ultimate liberation of Akṣarabrahman. As Svāminārāyaṇa explains in: “When the *jīva* attains a likeness to that Brahman ..., then that *jīva* can also be said to be *brahmarūpa*.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/20, p.439)

Convincingly, for example, by the identical descriptions found in CU 8/1/5 and then in CU 8/7/1, which relate, according to Bhadrēśadāsa, to Akṣarabrahman and the liberated *ātma*, respectively. The verses describe both as being without evil, free from old age and death, sorrow, hunger and thirst (physical or worldly cravings) and having all desires and wishes fulfilled.⁶⁵³

Bhadrēśadāsa provides a detailed justification of the referents of both these verses. He elaborates them with their different context—one for Akṣarabrahman in CU 8/1/5 and the liberated *ātma* in CU 8/7/1. In the latter, Bhadrēśadāsa enunciates that the first six qualities - being without evil and free of old age, death, sorrow, hunger thirst - are the liberated self's innate qualities, whereas the last two - having all desires and wish fulfilled - are received by association with Akṣarabrahman. He also emphasizes that this latter, not just a description of the liberated *ātma* but an instruction to spiritually liken and join on with the living *Akṣarabrahman* Guru as a way to that liberated state.⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵³ य आत्मापहतपाप्मा विजरो विमृत्युर्विशोको विजिघत्सोऽपिपासः सत्यकामः सत्यसंकल्पः सोऽन्वेष्टव्यः स विजिज्ञासितव्यः स सर्वान्श्च लोकानाप्नोति सर्वान्श्च कामान्यस्तमात्मानमनुविद्य विजानातीति ह प्रजापतिरुवाच ॥ (CU 8/7/1)

⁶⁵⁴ CUSB 8/7/1, pp.367–368

The need to become *brahmarūpa* and transcend ignorance is the main teaching and preachings of Svāminārāyaṇa and Guṇatitanand Svāmī. “This is not only for personal spiritual fulfillment and safety, they explain, but also to be able to devote oneself to Parabrahman fully. The only one who is *brahmarūpa* is worthy of offering devotion to Puruṣottama.” (Vac. Loya.7, p.303)

Closely after this statement, Svāminārāyaṇa cites a similar declaration found in. “He who becomes *brahmarūpa* (*brahmabhūtaḥ*) ... attains my supreme devotion.” (BG 18/54) Svāminārāyaṇa unpacks this *brāhmic* state, which is procured through the oneness with Akṣarabrahman, as one of personal holiness, ethical perfection, absolute fulfillment, freedom from *māyā* (*kāma* and base instincts), and singular devotion to and total indulging in Parabrahman. The best way to elaborate upon these aspects is to understand them in the two contexts that the state can be experienced - after death, in Akṣaradhāma, and while alive, on earth. Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa has accepted two types of liberation: *jīvanamukti* and *videhamukti*. Before we proceed to elaborate on these two types of liberation, at this point, an important distinction needs to be drawn between a *brahmarūpa* self ('being like Brahman') and Brahman itself.

5. Does *Jīva* Become Akṣarabrahman Through This Oneness?

When we talk about oneness with Akṣarabrahman⁶⁵⁵, that doesn't mean that *jīva* or *īśvara* become Brahman and leave their pre identity as *jīva* or *īśvaras*. Instead, the distinction between *jīvas* and *īśvaras* and Akṣarabrahman eternally remains. So, in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition, *jīvas* and *īśvaras* always remain ontologically distinct from Akṣarabrahman even after attaining oneness with him. Here, we will analyze this topic vastly and provide some debates on the matter.

⁶⁵⁵ Vac. Gadh. 2/3, MU 3/2/9

The MU starts the debate: “स यो ह वै तत् परमं ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति नास्याब्रह्मवित्कुले भवति । तरति शोकं तरति पाप्मानं गुहाग्रन्थिभ्यो विमुक्तोऽमृतो भवति” ॥ MU 3/2/9 ॥ “One who realizes that Akṣarabrahman becomes *brahmarūpa*. No one in their family is left ignorant of Brahman. They overcome grief and sin, and while becoming free of the shackles of the heart, they become immortal.” Here the subject of discussion is-“ब्रह्म वेद ब्रह्मैव भवति” is literally interpreted that one who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. But the SB explains: “इयमपि परब्रह्मोपासनौपयिकब्रह्मगुणसाम्यनिबन्धना सामानाधिकरण्योक्तिः न तु स्वरूपाभेदाभिप्रायिका” (MUSB 3/2/9, p.299)

“Here, *sāmānādhikaranyā* does not imply that both the self (*atman*) and Brahma are revealed as one ontological entity but to imbibe those virtues of Brahman which are inevitable for *upāsanā* towards Parabrahman.” Now we start the discussion with some background. A devotee who realizes, among others, the form, characteristics, virtues and abilities of the divine Akṣarabrahman by having a strong association with the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru and imbibing his teachings, assuredly becomes *brahmarūpa*.

The entity Akṣarabrahman is described within the *Mundaka Upaniṣad* beginning with, “*parā yayā tadakṣaramadhigamyate*.”⁶⁵⁶ It is described as superior according to “*hyakṣarāt parataḥ*,”⁶⁵⁷ since it eternally possesses superior form, virtues, abilities, etc. than that of the *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, *māyā*, and *akṣaramukta*. It is identified as Brahman because it is immense or vast in size and identified as such by *mantras* such as: “*tadetadakṣarabrahma*.”⁶⁵⁸ The grammatical congruence (*sāmānādhikaranyā*)⁶⁵⁹ seen here between the devotee and Brahman expresses that the devotee attains qualities similar to those of Brahman that are necessary for

⁶⁵⁶ MU 1/1/5

⁶⁵⁷ MU 2/1/2

⁶⁵⁸ MU 2/2/2

⁶⁵⁹ ‘*Sāmānādhikaranyā*’ refers to the implied unity between the subject and predicate nominative. This is also known as the unity of substratum, coordinate predication, or syntactic similarity.

practicing *upāsanā* towards Parabrahman. Here, *sāmānādhikaranya* does not imply that both the self (*ātman*) and Brahman are revealed as one ontological entity.

5.1 An Objection

Some argue that the assertion: "One who knows Brahman becomes Brahman" advocates that the self becomes one in the form with Brahman—the self becomes ontologically one with Brahman. They reaffirm that the revelation cannot be interpreted figuratively since doing so would contradict the use of the term '*eva*'. The self (*ātman*) indeed becomes one in form with Akṣarabrahman—the self becomes ontologically one with Brahman. Furthermore, they reason that there are *Śrutis*, such as "*aham brahmāsmi*,"⁶⁶⁰ "*ayamātmā brahma*,"⁶⁶¹ and "*brahma sampadyate tadā*,"⁶⁶² that support this identification. They claim that since the grammatical congruence between the terms within these revelations and the subject and predicate nominative are defined to be equal, there is no ontological distinction between the self (*ātman*) and Brahman. They present examples of sentences such as (1) "this pot is a water-pot" and (2) "this boy is a *Brāhmaṇa*" to demonstrate that these sentences express that (1) the pot is no different in form (*svarūp*) to the water-pot and that (2) the boy is not ontologically distinct from the referent of *Brāhmaṇa*. They claim that the above revelations from sacred texts and the current *mantra* should be interpreted in the same manner.

Moreover, they maintain that revelations such as "*brahmabhūtaḥ*,"⁶⁶³ "*brahmabhūtaḥ*,"⁶⁶⁴ "*brahmabhūyāya*,"⁶⁶⁵ and the notion of *brahmabhāva* (the experience of being Brahman) also suggest that the self (*ātman*) is ontologically one with Akṣarabrahman. They substantiate that the term '*bhāva*' is etymologically

⁶⁶⁰ BU 1/4/10

⁶⁶¹ MāU 1/2

⁶⁶² BG 13/30

⁶⁶³ BG 6/27

⁶⁶⁴ BG 5/24, 18/54

⁶⁶⁵ BG 14/26, 18/53

derived from the verbal root *'bhū*, which means to become—an indication that the identification is ontological. Thus, they maintain that the revelation presented in the current *mantra* to be like the phrase, "*mrdbhūto ghatah*,"⁶⁶⁶ which describes a pot forgoing its form (shape) to once again become clay. They continue by pointing out that the term '*rūpa*' is also often used to express ontological oneness. For example, the statement: "*Ghatarūpam dravyam*,"⁶⁶⁷ expresses that substance and the pot are ontologically one. They argue that the same type of identification should be expressed when the self (*ātman*) is described as *brahmarūpa*. Similarly, the phrase: *ghaṭātmakam dravyam*' also implies that substance and the pot are one. Thus, '*brahmātmānā*' and other similar constructions also imply identity of form (*svarūp*). Furthermore, the term '*aikyam*' (oneness) in terms such as '*brahmanaikyam*' also establish ontological oneness between the self (*ātman*) and Akṣarabrahman, just as it exists between a pot and the water-pot. Thus, they reason, "*brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*" advocates oneness in form (*svarūp*) between the self (*atman*) and Akṣarabrahman.

5.2 The Response

The ontological identification argued for is founded on various fallacious arguments. The relationship expressed within the present *mantra* is not one of ontological identity (having the same form (*svarūp*)), but rather of qualitative similarity (possessing similar qualities). Note: Within the commentarial tradition, it is common for the commentator to first present the views that object the principle advocated by the commentator. This presentation is identified as the *pūrvapakṣa*. Thereafter, the commentator systematically responds to each objection to establish one's own position, which is identified as the *siddhānta pakṣa*. The commentator of this work follows the commentarial tradition by first presenting the *pūrvapakṣa* and then countering each of the arguments posed. The commentator begins his response

⁶⁶⁶ 'A pot that has become a clay.'

⁶⁶⁷ 'substance in the form (*svarūpa*) of a pot.'

by first summarizing the various uses of grammatical congruence and the term ‘one’. Thereafter, he explains how these usages apply to the statements in question.

The commentary explains: It is common for words like ‘*eka*’ (‘one’) to be used to express possessing similar qualities. Consider the statement, “The *brāhmanas* in the royal family became one.” The ‘oneness’ of the *brāhmanas* expressed cannot indicate an oneness of their form (*svarūp*). Instead, it implies the oneness of opinion—they all possess the same view, and hence, are one. ‘One’ may also refer to being in the same place. Consider *ekibhavanti*⁶⁶⁸, a term used to express, for example, that (1) the cows gather in the cow-shed in the evening, (2) the birds gather on a branch or (3) that devotees gather in the mandir.

‘One’ may also be used to express the abandonment of a grudge or ill-will. For instance, consider the expression: “These two countries have become one.” ‘One’ may also express intense friendship between two parties. For example, within the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Hanumāna states to Sitā: “*rāmasugrīvayoraikyam*”⁶⁶⁹ to express the unity between Rāma and Sugrīva. ‘One’ may refer to being of the same class or kind. For instance, “These books are one (the same),” “These pots are one (the same),” and “These rice are one (the same)” —all of these expressions use ‘one’ to express categorical similarity. From these examples, it is evident that ‘being one’ is not solely used to express ontological identity but may imply various semantics. What is the intended meaning of the oneness expressed between the self (*jīvātman* and *īśvarātman*) and Akṣarabrahman?

⁶⁶⁸ To become one, however, as mentioned here, it is commonly also used to express: to gather, to unite, or to collect together.

⁶⁶⁹ *Rāmāyaṇa Sundarakanda*, 35/53

5.3 Qualitative Similarity

The oneness expressed in the *mantra* is in reference to the self-acquiring qualities that are similar to those of Akṣarabrahman. Through the grace of the manifest *Akṣarabrahmansvarūp* Guru and his association, the self attains certain qualities like those of Akṣarabrahman. Furthermore, due to the association with Akṣarabrahman, the spiritual aspirant comes to reflect and understand things in a way that is similar to Akṣarabrahman. For example, the *ātman* who has attained such oneness with Akṣarabrahman comes to possess conviction in Paramātmā like Akṣarabrahman. Just as Akṣarabrahman, they have a conviction such that: “I am undefiled,” “I am not the body, and above the three qualities (*guṇas*) of *māyā*.” This oneness also expresses being within the same location. As revealed in *mantras* such as: “*So'śnute sarvan kāmān saha brahmanā vipaschita*”⁶⁷⁰ the liberated *ātman* is within the same location as the servant form of Akṣarabrahman; they both reside within Parabrahman's divine abode, Akṣaradhāma.

5.4 Possessing *Brahmabhāva*

Furthermore, being engulfed in *māyā* and believing oneself to be the body both hinder *brahmabhāva* (the experience of attaining Brahman). When these two are removed, the *ātman* enriches with *brahmabhāva*-becomes like Akṣarabrahman. This is what is implied by the phrase, “*brahma sampadyate tadā*.”⁶⁷¹

5.5 Intense Adoration

When oneness between the *ātman* and the manifest *Akṣarabrahmasvarūp* Guru is interpreted as it was in the example of Hanumāna and Sugrīva presented earlier, it expresses the self as possessing intense association with Akṣarabrahman. As a result, realization attained through constant recollection or strong attachment may be articulated as having oneness with Akṣarabrahman. Thus, the sole intent of

⁶⁷⁰ TU 2/1/1

⁶⁷¹ BG 13/30

revealing *aikyam* (oneness) between the *ātman* and Akṣarabrahman is to express qualitative similarity acquired by the self, not to express ontological identity.

5.6 Summary

The above discussion on the various semantic ascriptions of 'oneness' may be summarized as:⁶⁷² Due to similarity in thought, type, qualities, location, time, spiritual state and other features, as well as by friendship and inseparability, things, though distinct, are yet identified as one. In the same manner, although *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are distinct entities, by possessing qualities that are similar to those of Brahman, they are identified as being one with Brahman.

5.7 The True Intention of *Sāmānādhikaranya*

It was argued earlier that the *sāmānādhikaranya* (grammatical congruence) in *mantras* such as “*aham brahmāsmi*”⁶⁷³ and “*ayamātmā brahma*”⁶⁷⁴ demonstrates ontological identity as it does in: “*ghato ’yam kalaśaḥ*.” This, however, is not the case. *Samanādhikāraṇa* is also used to express two different things as having similar attributes. The word '*sādharmya*' ('similarity') refers to having similar characteristics, and is defined as being ontologically different yet possessing many characteristics that are the same. This practice of using *sāmānādhikaranya* to express qualitative similarity is common. For instance, it is expressed within: “*simho māṇavakah*” ("the lion child"). In this example, both terms ('*simhah* and '*māṇavakah*') are in the nominative case; however, the phrase does not assert that the child is a lion in form (*svarūp*). Instead, it states that the child is lion-like-it possesses some characteristics of a lion.

⁶⁷² The commentator summarizes the above points in two couplets, which are translated here in prose.

⁶⁷³ BU 1/4/10

⁶⁷⁴ MaU 1/2

Those statements such as 1: *ayamātmā brahma* and “*aham brahmāsmi*” should be read similarly. When the self (*atman*) is revealed as being similar to Akṣarabrahman, it means that although the self is ontologically distinct, possesses many characteristics, such as being above the three qualities (*guṇas*) of *māyā*, being pure and others which are useful for the *upāsanā* of Paramātmā, that are like those of Akṣarabrahman. For this reason, the use of *sāmānādhikaranya* here refers to possessing qualities or virtues that are similar to those of Akṣarabrahman. The same interpretation should be understood for all such revelations in which *sāmānādhikaranya* is employed.

5.8 The Semantics of ‘Being Brahman’

It was also argued that '*brahmabhāva*' in revelations such as “*brahmabhūtam*,”⁶⁷⁵ “*brahmabhūtaḥ*,”⁶⁷⁶ and “*brahmabhūyāya*,”⁶⁷⁷ also expresses ontological identity between the self and Brahman. This is also inappropriate. The use of the verbal root '*bhū*' (meaning, to be) does not necessarily indicate ontological identity. '*Bhū*' is used even when there is an ontological distinction between two objects. See, for example: “*Gurau devabhāvam kurute*”⁶⁷⁸ and “*pitari devabhāvam karoti*.”⁶⁷⁹ Although one's Guru and father are not deities (*devas*), because they possess virtues similar to those of deities, they are identified as such. Terms such as “*brahmabhūtaḥ*” should also be read in this manner- to express Brahman's particular virtues. Moreover, it is observed that the qualities of the meditator follow those of that which is meditated upon. Thus, one who contemplates upon Akṣarabrahman attains *brahmabhāva*. In such circumstances, there is no complication of them becoming one entity.

⁶⁷⁵ BG 6/27

⁶⁷⁶ BG 5/24, 18/54

⁶⁷⁷ BG 14/26, 18/53

⁶⁷⁸ ‘believe one’s Guru to be a deity.’

⁶⁷⁹ ‘believe one’s father to be a deity.’

5.9 The Semantics of *Atmarūpa*

Similarly, terms such as '*atmarūpa*' only imply intense association. For example, when interpreting the expression "Durvāsa is anger personified," it is apparent that anger and Durvāsa are ontologically distinct entities. The expression is used not to express ontological identity, but instead to emphasize an intense association between the two-viz. anger entirely overcomes Durvāsa. The expression of oneness is understood figuratively. Also, statements such as "*ghaṭātmikā dr̥ṣṭiḥ*,"⁶⁸⁰ are interpreted to express that the pot is the focus of what is being seen. It does not mean that one's vision itself has become the pot. No one experiences the viewer viewing the pot as becoming the pot. Terms such as '*brahmātmanā*' and '*brahmarūpa*' should be understood in a similar way. By possessing an intense association with the manifest Akṣarabrahmasvarūp Guru and engaging in intense contemplation of him, the self attains oneness and continually sees and experiences Brahman. It is in this sense the self is identified as being *brahmarūpa*. The term '*rūpa*' is also used similarly. See, for example: "When a *jīva* attains similarity with Brahman through *samādhi*, that *jīva* is identified as *brahmarūpa*."

Within the *Gītā*, '*kāmātmanah*' does not express that the *jīvātman* itself becomes lust; however, it implies that self-possesses a lustful nature. It is explained as: "*kāmātmanah kāmasvabhāvāḥ*"⁶⁸¹ the same type of semantic ascription should be employed when deciphering: *brahmātmā*, or '*akṣarātmā*' and others. Alternatively, when the compound is analyzed as a possessive exocentric adjective compound,⁶⁸² it refers to one whose form is similar to that of Brahman. Therefore, one who has attained virtues that are similar to those of Brahman-one who has, among other things, overcome the three bodies and become free of the hindrances and grief of *māyā*- may be identified as *brahmarūpa* or Brahman.

⁶⁸⁰ Vision that has taken the form of the pot.

⁶⁸¹ BG 2/43

⁶⁸² *Bauvrihi* of the possessive case.

5.10 The Various Semantics of ‘Eva’

It was argued earlier that ‘eva’ in “*brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*” implies that each *ātman* and Akṣarabrahman are ontologically identical. This is also not the case. The term ‘eva’ is also used to express similarity. This semantic ascription of ‘eva’ is revealed in the *Nighaṇṭu*, where it states: “*sāmye caiva kvacicchabdah.*”⁶⁸³ The *Śrutis* also use ‘eva’ to express similarity; see, for example: “*Vaiṣṇava vāmanamālabheta, spardhamāno viṣnureva bhūtvemān lokānabhijayati.*”⁶⁸⁴ Here, ‘*Viṣṇu eva*’ is read as: ‘*Viṣṇu iva*’ (similar to Viṣṇu). Such usage is also seen in other instances. For example, Vardhamāna's *Ganatantramahodadhi* uses ‘eva’ in: “*śrīsta eva me'stu,*”⁶⁸⁵ to express similarity.

Moreover, when deciphering “*brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati,*” it is possible to rearrange its words.⁶⁸⁶ When ‘eva’ is sequenced to qualify the act of becoming, the *mantra* is read to express that one only becomes like Brahman--one does not become like anything else. Alternatively, when ‘eva’ is read in association with the knowing, the *mantra* is read to express: one who surely knows Brahman becomes Brahman. This reading stresses the need to realize Brahman in order to attain *brahmabhāva*. However, when ‘eva’ is associated with 'Brahman', the *mantra* is read to clarify that one does not become Parabrahman.

Also, ‘eva’ in “*brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*” may be understood to express that when a person of any caste, even one that is considered low, worships a *Brāhmaṇa* with devotion, they also become a *Brāhmaṇa*. This means that the worshipper of the *Brāhmaṇa* gains the qualities of a *Brāhmaṇa*. They do not, however, become ontologically one with the worshipped *Brāhmaṇa*. Similarly, the *ātman*, upon performing great spiritual endeavors in the form of *brahmavidyā*, becomes similar

⁶⁸³ “And the term ‘eva’ is sometimes used to express similarity.”

⁶⁸⁴ “When the competitor becomes Viṣṇu, he defeats the world.” (Tai.Sam. 2/1/3/16)

⁵⁴ “May your wealth become mine.”

⁶⁸⁶ Grammatical conjugations of terms in *Samskṛta* sentences are indicators on *Samskṛta* terms may be sequenced at.

to Brahman in qualities, but does not forgo its own form (*svarūp*) and does not attain the form (*svarūp*) of Brahman. It is not the case that “*ghate jñāte tadjñātā ’pi bhavati ghatah*” (The knower of a pot himself becomes a pot). Only the delusional would believe such a thing.

5.11 The Essence

The heart of the *Śruti*: “*brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati*,” reveals that one truly attains *brahmabhāva* when one realizes the form, nature, and virtues of the manifest *Akṣarabrahmasvarūp satpuruṣa*. Such realization occurs by associating with the Guru, contemplating his virtues and other qualities, and attempting to imbibe his qualities. Attaining such *brahmabhāva* is necessary for acquiring unhindered conviction in Parabrahman. The discussion presented here explains that “*brahmaiva san brahmapyeti*”⁶⁸⁷ does not advocate the self (*ātman*) and Brahman as ontologically one. Although both entities are ontologically distinct, the self (*ātman*) is concealed by Brahman in the way that the constellations are concealed by sunlight-the self (*ātman*) is engulfed by the greatness of Akṣarabrahman.

5.12 ‘Brahmarpanam’

Revelations such as “*brahmārpaṇam*”⁶⁸⁸ express Akṣarabrahman’s pervasiveness and do not denounce the other entities. Other terms such as ‘*brahmabhūta*’, ‘*brahmarūpa*’? ‘*brahmabhāva*’ and “*aham brahmāsmi*”, like *sāmānādhikaranyā*, express attaining the qualities of Brahman that are useful for attaining liberation.

5.13 Summary

The discussions above can be summarized as follows. *Sāmānādhikaranyā* is used to express having similar qualities. The same semantic is expressed when one's father is identified as a deity using the *Samskṛta* verb 'to be'. Although the father is

⁶⁸⁷ SU 3/3

⁶⁸⁸ BG 4/24

ontologically distinct from a deity, he is described as being a deity, because he shares certain qualities with a deity. ‘*Eva*’ expresses qualitative similarity both in sentences commonly used and in the Vedic revelations. When reading: ‘*brahmaiva bhavati*’, ‘*eva*’ should be interpreted in this manner. All scriptural revelations that imply oneness should be interpreted as expressing qualitative oneness and not ontological identity. If they are not read as such, then the five eternally distinct entities expressed in all sacred texts and expounded by Paramātmā himself,⁶⁸⁹ will be contradicted.

The *Upaniṣad mantra* concludes by describing various other benefits of realizing Brahman. It states that when one realizes Brahman, no one in their family lineage remains ignorant of Akṣarabrahman. Thus, everyone born into their family indeed comes to realize Brahman. Furthermore, the *brahmarūpa* devotee, in this very life, overcomes grief caused by the three types of misery.⁶⁹⁰ They overcome sin, which is the root of grief. Moreover, by becoming free of the *guhāgranthi*- innate, mundane, firmly rooted instincts such as attachment and spite, which have since eternity resided in the heart like shackles- they become *amṛta*. Upon becoming a *brahmarūpa* they, become an *akṣaramukta*, free from the cycle of births and deaths while being ever engrossed in the divine bliss of Paramātmā Sahajānanda.⁶⁹¹ In this way, Svāminārāyaṇa strongly rejects, that being *brahmarūpa* is not a substantial union but a qualitative similarity with Akṣarabrahman. The self remains metaphysically *jīva* or *īśvara*, albeit in a highly exalted spiritual state.

6. Jīvanamukti

As we mentioned earlier, in the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana, there are two types of *mukti*. The SSS discloses it in this way:

⁶⁸⁹ Vac. Gadh. 1/7, Vac. Gadh. 3/10

⁶⁹⁰ In Indian philosophy miseries are generally categorized into three types: *adhyatimika*-those that are mental, *adhibhautika*- those that are physical and *adhidevika*- those that are caused by natural or supernatural forces.

⁶⁹¹ Sadhu Paramvivekdasa, The MUSB, With Exposition and Original Devanagari Text, New Bhartiya Book Corporation, New Delhi, 2020, pp.187- 204.

सा पुनर्द्विविधा प्रोक्ता ब्रह्मस्थितिमतां ध्रुवा।

एका जीवत एव स्याद् अन्या च मरणादनु ॥SSSK 428॥

“This everlasting *mukti* for those who have attained oneness with Akṣarabrahman is said to be of two types: one that occurs while living and the other after death.” Out of these two *muktis*, we will first analyze *jīvanamukti*. *Jīvanamukti* is liberation while still having a body. One who has attained *jīvanamukti* experiences total absence of misery, becomes *brahmarūpa*, and experiences the presence and bliss of Paramātmā whilst alive. In the *Vacanāmṛta*, Svāminārāyaṇa has spoken of attaining the *brāhmic* state, or the highest state of enlightenment whilst still possessing a physical body.

“Thus, if one follows *satsaṅga* with perfect sincerity, then no deficiency will remain in one’s heart, and one will become *brahmarūpa* in this very lifetime.” (Vac. Sār. 9, p.224). In another discourse: “When the aspirant has kept his mind at the holy feet of Parabrahman in this way, he does not have to die to attain the abode of Parabrahman - he has attained it while still alive.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/7, p.594) In the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam*, *jīvanmukti* has also been substantiated. For instance,

यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः ।

अथ मर्त्योऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्नुते ॥⁶⁹²

“When all desires clinging to the heart of one fall off, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains Brahman.” Consequently, the Bhāṣyakāra comments on a *Śruti* about attaining the *brāhmic* state: “इत्थमिह साक्षात् श्रुतिरेव जीवनमुक्तिं प्रस्थापयति”⁶⁹³ “In this manner, here the *Śruti* itself establishes *jīvanamukti* as a vouched principle.” The IU acknowledges:

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।

सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥ IU 6॥

⁶⁹² KU 6/14

⁶⁹³ KUSB 6/14

“He who sees all beings in Parabrahman and Parabrahman in all beings does not suffer from any repulsion by that experience.”

यस्मिन्सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाभूद्विजानतः ।

तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥ IU 7॥

“He who has known that all beings are seen within Parabrahman, and he who has seen the Parabrahman everywhere, even though he understands Parabrahman to be one and forever pure, what sorrow and what delusion can overwhelm him?” Such a universal vision that is described in these verses, which is the ultimate product of our spiritual endeavor, comes only when one sees everything filled with Brahman and Parabrahman. Likes and dislikes arise because of the attachment of the mind with the objects of the world and because of the feelings of I-ness and my-ness. But he who achieves ‘*Ishavashya*’ perception becomes *jīvanmukta* and is no more troubled by the adversity of likes and dislikes. For him, everything belongs to Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, as a result, what delusion can overwhelm him. Moreover, such a *jīvanmukta* never harms any living being and is never be harmed by anyone.

Moreover, the *Gītā* mainly spares its fifth chapter for *jīvanamukti* and *videhamukti*. The Bhāṣyakāra states at the beginning of the chapter: “इदानीं स्वात्मब्रह्मरूपत्वसंपत्तिपूर्वकं परं ब्रह्म सक्षात्कुर्वतो योगिनो जीवन्मुक्तिदशां च विदेहमुक्तिदशां च प्रधानतः समुपदेक्ष्यन्ति पञ्चमे।”(BGSB Intro. 5/1, p.116) Now, the fifth chapter, predominantly describes the *yogi*’s state of *jīvanamukti* and *videhamukti*. For example,

शक्नोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक्शरीरविमोक्षणात् ।

कामक्रोधोद्वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः ॥BG 5/23॥

“One who is able to withstand the impulse of lust and anger before death is a *yogi* and a happy person.” Bhadrēśadāsa comments: “यः जनः शरीरविमोक्षणाद् देहपातात् प्राक् पूर्वं इहैव अस्मिन् देहे जीवन्नेव कामक्रोधोद्वेगं... कामक्रोधजनितं वेगं सोढुं प्रसहितुं शक्नोति समर्थो भवति स युक्तः स सुखी नरः।” (BGSB 5/23, pp.127-128) “A person who can endure the force of lust, anger etc.,

while living on earth before he dies is called a *yogi* and happy person forever.” In this way, *jīvanamukti* is a state where the *ātman* experiences full bliss of Parabrahman even whilst living in this mortal world. In this state, the obstacle of *māyā*, such as lust, anger, avarice etc., are completely uprooted.

The BS also confirms it: ऐहिकमप्यप्रस्तुतप्रतिबन्धे तद्दर्शनात्॥ BS 3/4/50॥ When the hindrances of *mukti* are subsided while living on earth, one attains *jīvanamukti*. The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “स्वात्मब्रह्मरूपत्वसम्पत्तिसंस्कृतप्रत्यक्षपरब्रह्मोपासनशीलस्य भक्तस्य अप्रस्तुतप्रतिबन्धे अप्रस्तुतेऽनुपस्थिते प्रतिबन्धे बाधके परमनिःश्रेयसाऽनुभूतिबाधके प्रणष्टे सति कामक्रोधाऽभिमानादि-प्रकृतिपराभवदेशकालादिवैपरीत्यादिलक्षणप्रतिबन्धविरहे सति ऐहिकमपि ब्रह्मरूपात्मना प्रत्यक्षपरब्रह्मसहजानन्द-तत्परमानन्दाद्यनुभूतिलक्षणपरममुक्तिरूपं फलमुत्पद्यते। एवमनेन जीवन्मुक्तिः प्रतिपादिता॥ (BSSB 3/4/50, pp.382-383)

“When a devotee attains *brahmabhāva* and offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman, all of his hindrances such as lust, anger, ego etc. are uprooted. As a result, this *brahmarūpa* devotee experiences the ultimate bliss of Parabrahman. In this way, *jīvanamukti* is asserted.” Here Bhadrēśadāsa explicitly acknowledges *jīvanamukti* by the actual words of the scriptures. Even though some scholars who are not believing in *jīvanamukti*, according to Bhadrēśadāsa, should revise their material.⁶⁹⁴ One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that *jīvanamukti* is a verified principle of the scriptures.⁶⁹⁵

According to the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, Parabrahman is always present on earth in a perceptibly accessible form. He either assumes the regal-role of a monarch (exhibiting thirty-nine redemptive virtues, as per *Śrīmad Bhāgawata*-1/16/26-28) or saintly role (exhibiting thirty redemptive virtues, as per *Śrīmad Bhāgawata* -

⁶⁹⁴ एवं सूत्रकारेणैव श्रुतिभिर्जीवन्मुक्तेः प्रसाधनाद् ये जीवन्मुक्तिरिस्कारपरिबद्धधियस्तैः श्रुतिशब्दाभिधानशक्तिविज्ञानविधुरैः कृत्स्नो वेदान्तार्थो न विदितः।

⁶⁹⁵ तत्र प्रमाणमाह तद्दर्शनाद् इति। दृश्यते हि ‘यदा सर्वे प्रमुच्यन्ते कामा येऽस्य हृदि श्रिताः । अथ मोऽमृतो भवत्यत्र ब्रह्म समश्रुते’(बृ.४/४/७, कठ.६/१४), ‘यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मन्येवानुपश्यति। सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ॥ यस्मिन् सर्वाणि भूतान्यात्मैवाऽभूद् विजानतः । तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ॥ (ई.६,७), ‘यदा पञ्चावतिष्ठन्ते ज्ञानानि मनसा सह। बुद्धिश्च न विचेष्टते तामाहुः परमां गतिम्॥(कठ.६/१०), ‘एतद् यो वेद निहितं गुहायां सोऽविद्याग्रन्थिं विक्रितीह सोम्य’(मु.२/१/१०), ‘पर्याप्तकामस्य कृतात्मनस्त्वहैव सर्वे प्रविलीयन्ति कामाः’(मु.३/२/२), ‘इहैव तैर्जितः सर्गो येषां साम्ये स्थितं मनः। निर्दोषं हि समं ब्रह्म तस्माद् ब्रह्मणि ते स्थिताः॥’(गी.५/१९), ‘न प्रहृष्येत् प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत् प्राप्य चाऽप्रियम्। स्थिरबुद्धिरसंमूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः ॥’(गी.५/२०), ‘शक्नोतीहैव यः सोढुं प्राक् शरीरविमोक्षणात्। कामक्रोधोद्वेगं वेगं स युक्तः स सुखी नरः॥’(गी.५/२३), ‘यतेन्द्रियमनोबुद्धिमुनिर्मोक्षपरायणः। विगतेच्छाभयक्रोधो यः सदा मुक्त एव सः॥’(गी.५/२८), ‘सर्वभूतस्थितं यो मां भजत्येकत्वमास्थितः। सर्वथा वर्तमानोऽपि स योगी मयि वर्तते ॥’(गी.६/३१) इति भूयोभूयो जीवत एव यथोक्तभक्तस्य मुक्तिफलाऽनुभवः शास्त्रोपदिष्टः।

11/11/23-33). Therefore, Parabrahman is always existent on earth to redeem the seekers of salvation.⁶⁹⁶ As an ascetic role, Parabrahman, through *Ekāntik Satpuruṣa* (*Akṣara-Guru*) uplifts the *ātman* to the level of *jīvanmukta*, and as a consequence, he then does not see the Guru as a Guru or a sadhu but sees Him as Parabrahman; wholly divine. What is narrated of as accomplishable after death, he has accomplished because of the endowment of divine vision by the manifest-incarnate Parabrahman.⁶⁹⁷ Both in his heart and outside before him (in the *Akṣara-Guru*), he sees nothing else but the same transcendental lord. This now becomes his ceaseless state. Therefore, *jīvanamukti* is a realistic state of experience, and not a conjecture, nor proximate-imminent attainment (*āsanna-mukti*).⁶⁹⁸ The released self becomes capable of seeing everything, for it now has become infinitely omniscient.⁶⁹⁹ The devotee, who has reached the state of *jīvanamukti*, if he so desires, does certainly see the nature of *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā* and Akṣarabrahman distinctly with their differentia, by the grace of Parabrahman.⁷⁰⁰ The fruit thus accumulated is as a consequence of his constant Parabrahman-consciousness (Parabrahman-remembrance).

Moreover, as the *darśana* (vision) of Parabrahman in the most effulgent blissful light of the highest abode is intuitively experienced by a *yogi*, in *samādhi*, who through the practice of eightfold disciplines of *yoga* has succeeded in traversing through all the six plexuses (*cakras*) in the body and has settled one-pointedly in the thousand-petalled lotus of *Brahmarandhra*. The same is intuitively visualized by the *jīvanamuktas*, by the blessing of Parabrahman, for they too are dwelling in the same highest level of *nirvikalpa samādhi*.⁷⁰¹

⁶⁹⁶ Vac. Var. 10

⁶⁹⁷ SV 1/1

⁶⁹⁸ IUSB 1, p.8

⁶⁹⁹ IUSB 7, p.16

⁷⁰⁰ Vac. Loyā. 15

⁷⁰¹ Vac. Gadh. 1/25, 40, Loyā. 12, 14; Gadh. 2/3,13,14,20

The scriptures like the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* (3/33/23-29) also enlighten the doctrine of *jīvanamukti* in its unique way. When, on the words of the great sage Kapila, his mother Devahuti realized her *ātman* as distinct from and transcendent to *prakṛti* and its products (body-mind complex), and fixed her mind on Parabrahman, she became firmly established in a state of *samādhi*: the communion with Parabrahman, all her *kleshas* (afflictions) were destroyed and she attained *kaivalya* (liberation) or *mokṣa* in an embodied state. Explaining this state of *jīvanmukta daśā*, the 29th verse says: “Her mind being fully merged in Lord Vāsudeva, she did not perceive her own body, which was completely given up to austerity and *yoga*, and was being maintained by providence, even when her hair got loose and her clothes fell off from her body.”

A spiritual seeker affiliated and committed to the perceptibly present (manifest) form of Parabrahman (*pratyakṣa-paramātmavarupa*) be it in the form of incarnate Parabrahman Himself or through the *Parama-Ekāntika-Satpuruṣa* (i.e. *Akṣara-Guru*)- alone can attain perfect self-realization and Parabrahman-realization, and the consequent blessing of Parabrahman's abode-vision (*pramatman's dhāma-darśana*) in an embodied state during worldly existence. When in the heart (*antaḥkaraṇa*), the aforesaid form of Parabrahman is meditated upon ceaselessly, the devotee attains the ultimate spiritual realization of the supreme divine form of Parabrahman, even without undergoing time-consuming strenuous practice of the eightfold path of *yogic* discipline. The highest state of *nirvikalpa samādhi* and Parabrahman-realization in the form of constant communion with Him is attained during worldly existence in an embodied state. Therefore, the ultimate attainment is not delayed, shrouded in mystery and dubious indecision. The state of *jīvanamukti* is attained as a fact of life. The devotee sees Parabrahman (perceptibly present manifest before him) as infinitely effulgent and divine.

He closes down seeing the individual objects of the peripheral world, and instead, he perceives Parabrahman alone in everything and everywhere.⁷⁰² He feels now divinely fully accomplished and self-fulfilled. He, consequently, becomes one with Parabrahman spiritually and psychologically despite being distinct from Him as His devout servant. This is the ultimate state of final dissolution (*ātyaṃtika-pralaya*) also known as *jñāna-pralaya* in which everything except Parabrahman (up to the level of *mūla-prakṛti* and *mūla-puruṣa*) gets out of the field of perception. Wherever he sees, he sees Parabrahman (the inner self of everything), failing to perceive an object as object. He becomes free from all the entangling adjuncts (*upādhis*) of *māyā* (*prakṛti*), and never gets bogged in *māyā* once again. He, by the grace of Parabrahman, becomes free like Parabrahman Himself i.e. He is not too governed and forced by the influences of *kāla* (time), *māyā* (nescience) and *kārma* (the pressures of the past actions). His constant perseverance on the path of knowledge (*jñāna-yagna*) and path of loving affiliation of body-mind in Parabrahman (*yoga-yagna*) finds its highest consummation in the form of highest Parabrahman-realization and constant Parabrahman-perception (*Paramātmān-darśana*) in one's very self.⁷⁰³

When an aspirant's *vṛtti* becomes completely immersed in the personality of current manifest form of (perceptible-*pratyakṣa*) Bhagavān, it is a final stage of *nirvikalpa samādhi* for it involves the detention of all the modifications (*citta-vṛtti-nirodha*) in the *svarūp* of Parabrahman. It is also described as a state of *yoganidra* enjoyed by the *yogis*, for it is filled with bliss and tranquility peculiar to it. Now nothing can disturb and distract him from constant contemplation of Parabrahman. When the *ātman* is associated with Akṣarabrahman, subsequently, becomes *brahmarūpa*, total servitude and utter humility come forth, and constant awareness of the ceaseless presence of Puruṣottama (Parabrahman) is envisioned in one's

⁷⁰² Vac. Kār. 7

⁷⁰³ Vac. Gadh. 2/8,13

ātman. The ego gets eliminated and false-body-awareness gets totally exterminated. Therefore, self-realization (*ātma-sākṣātkāra*) culminates in Parabrahman-realization (*Parāmatmasākṣātkāra*).

6.1 Experience of *Jīvanamukti*

Jīvanamukti is a state of the bliss of the highest communion with Parabrahman, here on earth in an embodied condition. It is a persistent spiritual experience in an embodied state, identical to the final experience to be had in a disembodied state after the death of the physical body. Wherever *jīvanamukt* casts his eyes he sees Parabrahman alone in everything. He, as the brahmanized (*brahmarūpa*) devotee, worships Puruṣottama with utter servitude and total self-effacement. Therefore, a true *jnāni* is a realized one who is *brahmarūpa* (brahmanized). He knows the transcendental glory of Parabrahman veritably. He has no desire to be fulfilled, nor has he any thought except that of Parabrahman in his mind. He is lost in total Parabrahman-consciousness. Svāminārāyaṇa highlights *jīvanmukta* state: “Wherever he glances among all the mobile and immobile forms - he sees the form of Parabrahman as if it is before his eyes, the same form that forever remains in Akṣaradhāma even after the dissolution of the body, the *brahmānda* and *Prakritipurusha*. Other than that form, he does not perceive even an atom. These are the characteristics of one who has attained Parabrahman-realization.”(Vac. Kār. 7, p.265) To figure out the experience process deeply we look at this principle from another perspective. This is about the ultimate dissolution of the world. In that time, the entire creation of *māyā* is vanished. De facto, this whole process is beyond our experience, but only a *jīvanmukta* can experience this state in his very life on earth.

After the dissolution of the universes (in *ātyantika-pralaya*), the incarnate Parabrahman manifests before the seeker alone is seen as existing. And again, at the time of creating everything afresh, the same incarnate manifest Parabrahman

alone through the instrumentality of *mūla-puruṣa* and *mūla-prakṛti* creates a countless number of universes. Such resolute right knowledge (*niścaya*) with the knowledge of Parabrahman's transcendental glory spawns deepest detachment and disinterest (*vairāgya*) in the heart. *Jñāna-pralaya* of such a lofty quality is called *ātyaṃtika pralaya*.⁷⁰⁴ According to the Svāminārāyaṇa Vedānta, *ātyaṃtika-pralaya* is a kind of total dissolution or regression in which there is a reversion of all the evolutes-each going back to its unmanifest state and returning into its earlier (preceding) emergent, till the whole process reaches to its primary source, i.e. the great unmanifest called *mūla-prakṛti* (or *mahā-māyā*) from which all developments had commenced stage-wise.

Svāminārāyaṇa explicitly explains the nature of *jñāna-pralaya* in its step by step that when one focuses his attention on earth, all the objects of the world with their names and forms are not cognized, instead only the earth remains in view. The earth has evolved from a small portion (*aṃśa*) of water. So, when the standpoint shifts to higher stage of water: the element subtler than the earth, the *jñāni* cognizes nothing else but water. And the water has emerged from a subtler portion of fire; therefore, he cognizes fire as the basis of all. And the fire has evolved from a subtler portion of air; and hence, air alone is cognized as the basis of all. And the air has evolved from a subtler portion of space; therefore, the space alone is cognized as all-encompassing entity.

The space has evolved from a subtler portion of *tāmasaahamkāra*, and all three forms of *ahamkāra* (*tāmasa*, *rājasa* ad *sāttvika*) together with sensory-motor organs, mind and their presiding deities have emerged from a subtler portion of *mahat-tattva*, and consequently, *Mahattattva* alone appears as all-encompassing entity. But, *mahat-tattva* also has evolved from a subtle portion of *pradhāna*-

⁷⁰⁴ Vac. Gadh. 1/24

prakṛti, and hence, it appears that *prakṛti* alone, exists. *Pradhāna-prakṛti* too gets submerged and eclipsed into *puruṣa*'s very subtle portion at the time of dissolution (*pralaya*); and from it alone, it sprouts forth like an emergent. So, when one sees from the standpoint of *puruṣa*, even *prakṛti* does not seem to exist and all that exists is *puruṣa* alone. And there are such infinite number of *Puruṣas* who emerge out from a small portion of *mahā māyā* (i.e. *mūla-prakṛti*), and hence, viewed from the standpoint of *mahā māyā*, it alone exists as the source of all. But this *mahā māyā* (*mūla-prakṛti*) also rests submerged and eclipsed in a small portion of *mahā puruṣa* (i.e. *mūla-puruṣa*). So, viewed from the level of *Mahāpuruṣa*, he alone exists and not even the *mahāmāyā*. *Mahāmāyā*, thus appears valueless-insignificant entity. Now, this *mahāpuruṣa* (a freed self) also has come (arisen) forth from a small portion (place) of the Akṣara (Brahman): the abode of Parabrahman. So, taking into account the all-pervading, all immanent Akṣara, it looks as if, and Akṣarabrahman alone exists. But when the knowledge-vision (*jnāna-dṛṣṭi*) reaches its apex, one finds the supreme truth that the only Supreme Reality transcendent to Akṣarabrahman, namely *Puruṣottama* (Parabrahman) alone exists. He alone is the source and support of all. He is the cause of all causes, and hence, is immanent in all effects to the remotest extent.

He is the cause of all creation-sustenance-destruction. He is the enselving inner self of all. Alongside having His original transcendental divine form ever-present in His abode. When the *jnāni* reaches this level of resolute knowledge (*niscayatmakajnāna*), nothing except Parabrahman remains shining in his vision. He sees Parabrahman everywhere in everything. And that transcendental Parabrahman is the same as one present before me in His manifest incarnate form (*pratyakṣa-parāmatma svarūp*). When this conviction dawns upon the knower, all sensory-motor apparatus and the mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) get instantaneously divinized by the grace of Parabrahman, and he becomes the knower of Parabrahman in the true sense

of the term. Thus, Parabrahman is knowable, and He is known; but Parabrahman's knowledge comes through Parabrahman alone, by His grace!⁷⁰⁵

The BG discloses:

योगयुक्तो विशुद्धात्मा विजितात्मा जितेन्द्रियः ।

सर्वभूतात्मभूतात्मा कुर्वन्नपि न लिप्यते ॥⁷⁰⁶

“A *Karma-yogi* whose mind is pure, whose mind and senses are under control, and who sees one and the same self in all beings, is not bound by *kārma* though engaged in work.” Bhadrēśadāsa explains the experience of a *jīvanmukta* by commenting on this verse: “ब्रह्मभूतो ब्रह्मगुणसाधर्म्यमाप्त आत्मा यस्य स ब्रह्मरूपः सन्नित्यर्थः...सर्वथा कर्मणि प्रवर्तमानोपि मुक्त एवावतिष्ठत इति भावः।”(BGSB 5/7, p.119) “One who has become brahmarūpa encompasses the virtues of Brahman; he is never bound by any *karma* in which he indulges.” In this way, the BG invests so many *ślokas* in elucidating the experience of a *jīvanmukta*.⁷⁰⁷ The *jīvanmukta* does all work as an offering to Parabrahman- abandoning attachment to results-remains untouched by *kārmic* reaction or sin, just as a lotus leaf never gets wet by water. Moreover, he neither rejoices on obtaining what is pleasant nor grieves on obtaining the unpleasant. He possesses a steady mind and is a knower of Brahman; such a person abides in Brahman.

In a similar way, the BSSB also throws light to highlights the state of *jīvanmukta*:

“ब्रह्मवेदनस्याऽन्यदप्यानुषङ्गिकं फलमाह नाऽस्याऽब्रह्मवित् कुले भवतीति। अस्य ब्रह्मसाक्षात्कारवतो ह्युपासकस्य कुले कोऽपि तत्पुत्रपौत्रादिः अब्रह्मविद् अक्षरब्रह्मज्ञानशून्यो न भवति। तत्कुलजोऽवश्यं ब्रह्मवेतैव सम्पद्यत इति भावः। अन्यान्यपि फलान्याह स ब्रह्मरूपो भक्तः शोकं त्रिविधतापजन्यशोकं तरति जीवन्नेवातिक्रामतीत्यर्थः । पाप्मानं शोकमूलभूतं च पाप्मानमपि तरति। तथा च गुहाग्रन्थिभ्यो हृदयगुहायां वर्तमानेभ्यो ग्रन्थिवद् दुर्मोचनीयेभ्योऽनादितः सुरूढमूलेभ्यो रागद्वेषाद्यात्मकप्राकृतस्वभावग्रन्थिभ्य इत्यर्थः।

⁷⁰⁵ Vac. Gadh. 1/51

⁷⁰⁶ BG 5/7

⁷⁰⁷ ब्रह्मण्याधाय कर्माणि सङ्गं त्यक्त्वा करोति यः ।

लिप्यते न स पापेन पद्मपत्रमिवाम्भसा ॥ ५-१०॥

न प्रहृष्येत्त्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत्प्राप्य चाप्रियम् ।

स्थिरबुद्धिरसम्मूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः ॥ ५-२०॥

विमुक्तः रहितः सन् अमृतो भवति, ब्रह्मरूपेण स्वात्मना परमात्मसहजानन्ददिव्यानन्दमग्नो जन्ममरणरहितोऽक्षरमुक्तो भवतीत्यर्थः॥ (MUSB 3/2/9, p.304) “The *Upaniṣad mantra* concludes by describing various other benefits of realizing Brahman. It states that when one realizes Brahman, no one in their family lineage remains ignorant of Akṣarabrahman. Thus, everyone born into their family surely comes to realize Brahman.

Furthermore, the *brahmarūpa* devotee, in this very life, overcomes grief caused by the three types of misery. They overcome sin, which is the root of grief. Moreover, by becoming free of the ‘*guhagranthi*’, the innate, mundane, firmly rooted instincts such as attachment and spite, they become *amṛta*. Upon becoming a *brahmarūpa*, they become free from the cycle of births and deaths, and enjoy the divine bliss of Paramātmā Sahajānanda.”

Here, the question emerges, ‘How does the effulgent divine body come forth (or emerge) to a seeker attaining *mokṣa*?’ The truth is enunciated in the *Vacanāmṛta*.⁷⁰⁸ It can be put in simple words that just as in a finer tin-mold in a human shape, you keep on pouring water inside and allow it to freeze to ice-state yielding shape of ice-statue in human-shape. And in the process, the outer cover of the finer tin-mold gets totally rusted-corroded and wears out and sheds. Or, just as forecasting a vax-icon in a clay-mold of icon-shape, you keep on filling it with liquid (molten/boiled) vax, which when cools and becomes a vax-icon, the mold is broken off and the icon is carried away by its owner. In the same manner, an aspirant clothed in the mold of *prārabdha-kārma*-born *māyic*-body, when comes in contact of the *Parama-Ekāntik-Satpuruṣa* (*Brahmasvarūp Santa*), and as he keeps on learning from him the right knowledge concerning the transcendental-glorious-divine nature of Parabrahman manifest before him (*pratyakṣa-Bhagavān*), the unyielding knowledge (*niścaya*) of Parabrahman gradually keeps on settling in his self, and

⁷⁰⁸ Vac. Gadh. 1/51, Sar. 12 & 17, Kar. 1 & 7, Loya 7 and Var. 11.

along with that his sensory-motor organs, *prāṇa*, mind (*antaḥkaraṇa*) etc. keep turning divine. His Parabrahman-consciousness becomes profound and permanent. Besides, in addition, in the company of *Brahma-svarūp Satpuruṣa* (*Akṣara-Guru*), as his *brāhmi-sthiti* (acquisition of brahmanhood) keeps burgeoning and forming and the component virtues (*dharma-jñāna-vairāgya-bhakti*) of *ekāntik-dharma* keeps flourishing and flowering; the divine effulgent body of the nature of consciousness-bliss keeps on advancing and increasing.

In this manner, when the whole process reaches its zenith (completion) and when both *niścaya* (resolute knowledge) and *Brāhmi-ekāntiki-stithi* (spiritual conversion into brahman-form) reaches the state of excellence, he becomes a *jīvanmukta*; and in his personal divine-effulgent body already takes a shape to its perfection. Now, the *jīvanmukta* simply waits for wish of Parabrahman to break-off this *māyic*-body-mold and carry him to the ultimate abode, to serve Him for eternity. At the termination of the physical body, leaving the *prārabdha*-born body, he departs to the abode of Parabrahman with a divine-effulgent body thus acquired. Of course, till the death of the physical body, such a *jīvanmukta* lives with his divine body in his perishable physical body, as if like a sword sheathed in a scabbard. He, like a snake, who has acquired new skin and the old one has been already loosened and detached but waiting to crack down and open up, so that it can slough it and leaving it behind, and can go away. In the same manner, *jīvanmukta* who has become free from the bonds of *avidyā-kāma-vāsanā* and body attachments, and has a new divine-effulgent body already formed inside (as if like a full-term grown baby in the womb), has no more *prārabdha* to suffer, but yet waits in it for His Lord's will and call; and hence, a *jīvanmukta* cannot be viewed on par with other aspirants who are otherwise looking alike.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁹ Gopālānanda Sādhū, *Gopālānanda Svāminī Vāto*, 1/303, Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa Gurukula Rājakoṭa, 1984, p.141

Now a question may arise that does the *jīvanmukta* continue to offer devotion and *upāsanā* even after attaining this liberated state? The BSSB replies: “ये हि सम्यगुपासनानुष्ठानेन जीवन्मुक्तिदशां प्राप्तास्तेष्वनायासेन परमानन्दमनुभवन्तस्तदुपासनं नित्यमनुतिष्ठन्ति एव” (BSSB 2/1/12, p.389) “After offering the highest level of *upāsanā* to Parabrahman, one attains the state of *jīvanamukti*. However, he indulges in the same *upāsanā* towards Parabrahman continuously after attaining the state of *jīvanamukti* while experiencing the bliss of Parabrahman.”

A *jīvanmukta* feels delivered from the misery and limitations of bodily existence. The physical body does not restrict or obstruct him in anyway. He reaches a state of divine ecstasy in which the bliss of Parabrahman keeps welling up from within. He reaches the state of total fulfillment and contentedness. He feels fully accomplished, enjoying the highest bliss of Parabrahman, which is otherwise sought after the perish of the physical body. He is in the body, but not in the sway of it, and he is turned inward, but enjoying the presence of Paramātmā in his *ātman*.

6.2 Is *Jīvanamukti* Possible While living?

This question was put before Prajāpati by Indra in the CU. Prajāpati explains:

मघवन्मर्त्यं वा इदं शरीरमात्तं मृत्युना
तदस्यामृतस्याशरीरस्यात्मनोऽधिष्ठानमात्तो वै
सशरीरः प्रियाप्रियाभ्यां न वै सशरीरस्य सतः
प्रियाप्रिययोरपहतिरस्त्यशरीरं वाव सन्तं न
प्रियाप्रिये स्पृशतः ॥CU 8/12/1॥

“Maghavan, this body is mortal and always held by death. It is the *ātman*, the self, which is immortal and without body. When in the body (by thinking this body is I and I am this body) the self is held by pleasure and pain. So long as he is in the body, he cannot get free from pleasure and pain. But when he is free of the body (when he knows himself different from the body), then neither pleasure nor pain touches him'.

After this systematic argumentation, the findings of the *Śruti* literatures reveal and consolidate the state of *jīvanamukti*. Based on this *Śruti* the Bhāṣyakāra writes: “न पुनः सशरीरस्य जीवतो मुक्तिर्निराक्रियते...इत्याद्यक्षरपुरुषोत्तमस्वरूपविज्ञानवत आत्मनो जीवन्मुक्तस्थितिरुक्तोपपद्यते” (SSS, Phaladhārā, p.379) “Thus, the state of *jīvanamukti* cannot be refuted whatsoever. This state is experienced by those who have realized Akṣara and Puruṣottama.” Svāminārāyaṇa states in Vac. Gadh. 2/28: If a person has the association of the *bhakta* of Parabrahman and Parabrahman is pleased upon him, then even though he is in *mṛtyu loka* [i.e. on earth), he is still in the abode of Parabrahman. As striking as these statements from Svāminārāyaṇa may seem, this emphasis on enlightenment ‘here’ can also be found in the *Upaniṣads*. The last *mantra* of MU 2/1/10, for example, begins:

पुरुष एवेदं विश्वं कर्म तपो ब्रह्म परामृतम् ।

एतद्यो वेद निहितं गुहायां सोऽविद्याग्रन्थिं विकिरतीह सोम्य ॥ (MU 2/1/10)

“Parabrahman is the *ātman* of all; the world, sacrifice, penance, great Akṣarabrahman etc. he who knows this hidden in the cave (of the heart), he, O friend, scatters the knot of ignorance here on earth.” The *Upaniṣads* invariably talk about the *jīvanmukta* and reveal that one can live on earth as immortal while living in this mortal body. For example: All his desires are destroyed here. (MU 3/2/2) Both KU 6/14 and BU 4/4/7 identically talk of the enlightened person who has overcome all desires for *māyic* pleasures. Then, that mortal becomes immortal and experiences Brahman here. On commenting on all four of these phrases.

Bhadreśadāsa explains: “स परमात्मोपासक अविद्याग्रन्थिं सुदृढामपि स्वात्मवेष्टितमायामित्यर्थः। इह अस्मिन्नेव लोके, जीवन्नेवेति तात्पर्यम् विकिरति निरस्यतीत्यर्थः... इति जीवन्मुक्तिः प्रस्थापिता॥” (MUSB 2/1/10, pp.266-267) “The seeker who is offering *upāsanā* to Paramātmā, eradicates *māyā*. The word ‘here’ ‘*atra*’ or ‘*iha*’ to mean in this very body, on this same realm, while alive. In this way, *jīvanamukti* is propounded.⁷¹⁰ The *Bhagavad-Gītā*, too, has such mentions

⁷¹⁰ MUSB 2/1/10, pp. 266-267; MUSB 3/2/2, pp. 292-293; KUSB 6/14, p.166; BUSB 4/4/7, p.273

of here related to the enlightened *brāhmikastate* {*brāhmi stithi*}. For example: “Even here, *māyic* existence is overcome by those whose minds are established in equality. Brahman is equal and guile-less. Therefore, they are established in Brahman.” (BG 5/19) This enlightened state continues to be described further on in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*'s fifth chapter, where a person without any desires and in complete control of his senses and mind is revealed as a ‘*mukta*’ (28) and ‘*brahmabhūtaḥ*’, i.e. ‘*brahmarūpa*’ (24), having indeed attained ‘*brahmanirvāṇa*’ (24, 25 and 26) or the *brāhmic* state (20) here, before the body is shed (23). Similarly, other characteristics can be found in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* of the person with an equipoised mind (*sthitaprajña*) (BG 2), the ‘*yogin*’ (BG 6), the ‘*jñāni*’ (BG 7), the beloved devotee (*priya bhakta*) (BG 12) and the person who has transcended the influence of all *māyic* qualities (*gunātita*) (BG 14) - all descriptions, according to Bhadrēśadāsa, of the *brāhmi stithi* or *brahmarūpa jīvan-mukta*.

Svāminārāyaṇa similarly describes this state of living enlightenment as one characterized by complete desirelessness for worldly pleasures (Vac. Gadh. 1/56, Gadh. 1/60, Gadh. 2/4), equanimity amid all dualities (Vac. Loyā.16, Loyā.10, Gadh. 2/1, Gadh. 2/4) and independence from the body, senses, faculties and all other *māyic* or *karmic* influences (Vac. Gadh. 1/62, Sār. 11, Loyā.10, Amd.2). Most importantly, it is a state of complete self- and Parabrahman-realization, wherein the *jīvanmukta* direct experiences Parabrahman in all his resplendent glory (Vac. Gadh. 1/20, Gadh. 1/23, Sār.16), both within their own self (Vac. Sār.10, Sār.12, Gadh. 2/8, Gadh. 2/62) and wherever they turn (Vac. Gadh. 1/26, Kār.7), as if Parabrahman or his abode is not even an atom away (Vac. Sār.10). The *mukta*'s senses and mind are now totally engrossed in Parabrahman (Vac. Gadh. 1/51, Kār.1). Nothing else remains noticeable (Vac. Gadh. 1/24, Gadh. 1/26); they experience Parabrahman in everyone and in everything (Vac. Kār.7).

On the basis of the above-mentioned discussion, we can provide some characteristics of a *jīvanmukta* as under:

1. His⁷¹¹ mind and all the ten sensory-motor organs remain totally Parabrahman-oriented.⁷¹²
2. He realizes his essential nature as Brahman (similar to Akṣara-brahman), and in it, he ceaselessly perceives the presence of Puruṣottama. He thus dwells in constant Parabrahman-consciousness.⁷¹³
3. All his *vṛttis* are controlled and arrested and become *ātman*-oriented. His *vāsanā* (the *liṅga-deha*), the cause of transmigratory cycles, get totally annihilated consequently, by the light of right knowledge, he realizes his essential nature as Brahman (Akṣara); and in it, he constantly visualizes the presence of Supreme Nārāyaṇa (Parabrahman).⁷¹⁴
4. He dwells in the ceaseless steadfast experience of being a pure *ātman* indwelt by Paramātmā.⁷¹⁵
5. The consummation of right knowledge in his case results in *jñāna-pralaya* i.e. the cognitive-experience of dissolution of everything born of *mūlaprakṛti*. Consequently, *māyā-prakṛti* does not hit back upon him to create any bondage again.⁷¹⁶
6. He, then remains engrossed in the servile devotion to Parabrahman. He does not need any more birth to return to the earth. Even then, he remains *dharma*-abiding as a more responsible devotee. However, by the will of Parabrahman, if at all he takes birth, he is not born in sin, nor by the influence of *māyā*, *kāla*, *kārma* etc. Freely does he visit the earth, like eternally free Parabrahman.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹¹ The word he, here reflects both genders (He and she, his and her). According to *Svāminārāyaṇa* philosophy, everyone can become *jīvanmukta*.

⁷¹² Vac. Gadh. 1/51

⁷¹³ Vac. Gadh. 1/20

⁷¹⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/66

⁷¹⁵ Vac. Loyā. 10

⁷¹⁶ Vac. Abd. 2

⁷¹⁷ Vac. Abd. 2

7. On account of (*jñāna-pralaya*) cognitively realized dissolution of everything, he now sees the same beautiful-effulgent-divine transcendental form of Parabrahman eternally dwelling in the highest abode, in everything and everywhere. So, for him now, there is no point in the space devoid of the divine presence of his Parabrahman.⁷¹⁸

In this manner, the *jīvanamukti* is a prominent principle of the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana. It is indeed a real state.⁷¹⁹

6.3 Why Does the *Jīvanmukta* Live on Earth?

A valid question at this stage would be: Why does a *jīvan-mukta* live on at all. Should he or she not die straight away and transcend into blissful fellowship with Parabrahman in his abode? Once the *kāraṇa* body of an aspirant is destroyed, one becomes a *jīvanmukta* (one who has attained *jīvanamukti*) and no form of *māyā*, I-ness or my-ness remains. Consequently, all love and hate, desires, *svabhāvas*, and attachment towards the body are also destroyed. At the same time, through offering devotion, service, and *upāsana* to Parabrahman and serving the manifest *Satpuruṣa*, the *sañcita kārmas* from previous lives are also destroyed. Now devoid of any I-ness, my-ness, and prejudices, such a *jīvanmukta* does not under any circumstances perform any improper *kārmas* which are against Parabrahman's wishes.

Svāminārāyaṇa advocates: "One should understand that as being Parabrahman's wish. In reality, such a person has nothing left to accomplish; he is fulfilled and has reached the culmination of all spiritual endeavors." (Vac. Gadh. 2/13, p.421) On Parabrahman's command, the *jīvanmukta* performs pious *kārmas* for the purpose of pleasing Parabrahman only; those *kriyaman kārmas* are a form of *bhakti* and not a form of attachment. (Vac. Gadh. 2/11) "एवामुपसनाबलात् सकलपुण्यपापनाशेषि कारणशरीरप्रक्षयेपि स्थूलस्य

⁷¹⁸ Vac. Kār. 7

⁷¹⁹ See also IUSB 6-7, pp. 15-17, CUSB 8/3/3, pp. 352-353 and CUSB 8/12/1, - BGSB 18/54, p.361.

देहस्य असंश्लेषस्तु पाते एतच्छरीरपात एव। जीवन्मुक्तो हि नष्टकारणशरीरोपि परमात्मेच्छामात्रहेतुना धृतशरीरः सन्नभिवर्तते। तस्यायं कायविश्लेषः शरीरपात एव”(BSSB 4/1/14, p.391) “Due to Parabrahma’s *upāsanā* one can eradicate all his desires. In this state, the causal body is uprooted, even though the physical body still remains. It departs only after death. In this way, a *jīvanmukta* remains alive even after his causal body is uprooted which is the prominent cause for the cycle of births and deaths. He lives his life as the wish of Parabrahman till his death.” प्रारब्धं खल्वस्या देहस्थितेर्निमित्तम्। तदवधेः शरीरपातावधेस्तत्स्थितेः। इदमत्राऽवधेयम्। देहनिमित्तं प्रारब्धमपि न हि कर्मविधया यावदायुषं शरीरधारणप्रयोजकमपि तु परमात्मेच्छाऽऽनुगुण्येनैवेति विशेषः । अत एव लिङ्गशरीरनाशोऽपि परमात्मकृपैकनिबन्धनो भगवद्भक्तस्य जीवत्काले, तदेहान्तकाले वा, तदुत्क्रमणे मार्गे वा यदा कदाऽपि परब्रह्मेच्छाऽनुसारमेव प्रवर्तत इति तदधिगमाधिकरणम्। (BSSB 4/1/15, p.391) “As far as one’s life is concerned, it is due to his *prārabdha kārma*. It decides the duration of one’s lifespan. It should be noted that for *jīvanmukta* devotee, *prārabdha kārma* doesn’t decide his or her life span but Parabrahman himself decides it. By Parabrahman’s wish and grace the *jīvanmukta* lives, dies and goes to the abode of Parabrahman via divine celestial path even after causal body is eradicated.”

Although a *jīvanmukta* has to experience the consequences of his *prārabdha kārma*, yet through Parabrahman’s grace it is endured with smiling face by the *jīvanmukta*. He does not get disturbed or miserable in any way due to experiencing the pain of his *prārabdha kārmas*. Even if his *prārabdha* leads to misery or suffering, he understands it to be only due to the will of his beloved Parabrahman. Svāminārāyaṇa clears the point: “If one has completely understood the essence of this discourse, then regardless of whether one is reborn in a base or elevated life form due to one’s *prārabdha kārmas*, still, like Vrutrāsura, one will not forget this *jñāna*. Also, when Bharataji was reborn as a deer, he retained *jñāna* from his previous life. Such is the profound greatness of this *jñāna*.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/13, p.421)

Thus, he or she continues to experience the state of being *jīvanmukta* until their *prārabdha kārmas* are exhausted. So, the answer to the question of why the *jīvanmukta* lives on earth, we conclude by saying that even while freed of all *māyic* influence and therefore not accruing any new *kārmas*, a *jīvanmukta* still has a residual stock of past *kārmas* (called *prārabdha*), which have been activated and need to be depleted. These are responsible for the current gross and subtle body. As soon as they are exhausted, no further reason remains for the body to exist, and the self can then discard it and transcend to Akṣaradhāma. While alive, though, it must be stressed, the body carries no influence over the liberated self within. Svāminārāyaṇa explains with various analogies that the self rattles distinctly separate from within the body, like a sword in its scabbard or a seed within a dried mango; the body merely the old slough on molting snake to be shortly shed (VR 149; BU 4/4/7).

7. Videhamukti

Bhadreśadāsa defines:

देहपातोत्तरं लभ्या विदेहमुक्तिरुच्यते।

अक्षरधाम्नि भोग्येयं मूर्तिमद् ब्रह्मणा सह ॥ SSSK 437 ॥

“The liberation attained after shedding the mortal body is *Videhamukti*. The released self experiences the bliss of such liberation in Akṣaradhāma along with the human form of Akṣarabrahman.” *Videhamukti* is to attain the highest state of enlightenment after leaving the mortal body. Once all the *prārabdha kārmas* of a *jīvanmukta* have been experienced, his or her association with the *sthūla* and *sūkṣma* bodies also ends, and he or she then goes to Parabrahman’s Akṣaradhāma.⁷²⁰

To attain Akṣaradhāma and experience the bliss of Parabrahman is the ultimate goal of a devotee. As Guṇatitanand Svāmī says: “Our sole wish should be that we want to go to Akṣaradhāma.” (SV 1/301) “We must have the firm conviction that we

⁷²⁰ Vac. Gadh.1/1, 1/21

want to go to Akṣaradhāma and serve Parabrahman forever with the company of the *akṣaramuktas*.” (SV 7/21)

This is the essence of our scriptures. The scriptures described it as the ultimate *puruṣārtha*, the goal of every self. Indeed, this is the fruit of spirituality as well. A considerable amount of literature has been published on this *parama puruṣārtha*, ultimate goal or the ultimate liberation. These studies, however, present the complex findings which make the topic more critical, but within the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana, the first and simplest way to understand liberation is the findings which are firstly experienced by the preachers.⁷²¹ As a state of supreme, unending bliss and perfect, ceaseless devotion to Parabrahman, this is the ultimate goal and consummation of all spiritual understanding and praxis towards which Svāminārāyaṇa inspires his devotees. For example, in Vac. Gadh. 1/21, he urges: All members of our fellowship should develop the following singular conviction: “We also wish to join the ranks of the *akṣararūpa muktas* and go to Akṣaradhāma to forever remain in the service of Parabrahman. We have no desire for the temporary and vain worldly pleasures; nor do we wish to be tempted by them in any way.” Whoever “accepts my refuge and abides by the *niyama*, then in his last moments, I will grant him My *Darśana* and take him to Parabrahman’s Akṣaradhāma.” (Vac. Jet. 5)

Svāminārāyaṇa calls this my principle (*Siddhānta*) when asked by a follower of the *Dvaita* School to explain his philosophical system in brief. After concisely expounding the five eternal realities, Svāminārāyaṇa says in conclusion: When a *jīva* seeks the refuge of Parabrahman, it overcomes Parabrahman's *māyā*, becomes *brahmarūpa* ..., attains the abode of Parabrahman, and becomes his attendant. This is my principle. (Vac. Gadh. 3/10)

⁷²¹ Vac. Gadh.2/13, 3/39

This place in Akṣaradhāma, Svāminārāyaṇa clarifies, is the state of liberation achieved after death, upon leaving the material body behind reason, it is called *videhamukti* (incorporeal liberation). He states for the example: “After such an enlightened devotee (*ekāntik bhakta*) leaves his body becomes free of all influences of *māyā*, he attains Akṣaradhāma.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/21) Bhadreśādāsa elucidates this point while commenting on the verses of the KU 2/15, 16, 17 in which he discusses the word ‘*padam*’ that implies for Akṣaradhāma. After providing vivid references of the *Prasthānatrayī*, he proves that it is Parabrahman’s abode where the liberated self goes after leaving its physical body. In his conclusion, he clarifies: “तथा हि ब्रह्मस्वरूपसत्पुरुषप्रसङ्गेन, तस्मिन्नात्मबुद्ध्यादिना च ब्रह्मात्मैक्यं प्राप्य, तादृशेन ब्रह्मरूपेणात्मना परं परमात्मानं तत्त्वत उपास्य, लौकिकदेहपातोत्तरं दिव्याक्षरधाम्न्यपि मनुष्याकारां दिव्यां ब्राह्मीं तनुं परमेश्वरेच्छया प्राप्य, तद्धामस्थेन मनुष्याकारेणैव मूर्तिमताऽक्षरब्रह्मणा सह तद्ब्रह्मैव परमात्मसहजानन्ददर्शनानन्दात्मकेन सर्वोत्कृष्टदिव्यभोगवैभवेन महीयत इति सम्पूर्णभावः।” (KUSB 2/17, p.112)

“By the company of the *brahmasvarūpa Satpuruṣa*, a seeker attains oneness with him and becomes a *brahmarūpa*. The *brahmarūpa* devotee continuously offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman till his death. After his death, he enters the abode of Parabrahman and gets the divine *Brāhmic* body by the wish and grace of Him. The liberated self now experiences the ultimate bliss of Parabrahman with the company of Akṣarabrahman itself while residing in the abode.” The BSSB also confirms this fact: ब्रह्मरूपस्य परोपासकस्य विदेहमुक्तौ ब्राह्मवपुर्लक्षणं नवतरं दिव्यरूपमभिनिष्पद्यते इति। (BSSB 4/4/1, p.416) “One who is *brahmarūpa* and offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman attains new divine *Brāhmika* body in the *videhamukti* state.” And, of course, the BG also echoes this principle by a number of verses. For example:

ओमित्येकाक्षरं ब्रह्म व्याहरन्मामनुस्मरन् ।

यः प्रयाति त्यजन्देहं स याति परमां गतिम् ॥BG 8/13॥

“While constant remembrance on Akṣarabrahman which is defined as AUM, the sacred sound of Brahman, and offers *upāsanā* to me, attains the supreme goal.”

Bhadreśadāsa provides the definition of the supreme goal: स परमां गतिं सर्वसमुत्कृष्टगन्तव्यस्थानभूतमक्षरधाम याति प्राप्नोति इति। (BGSB 8/13, p.186) “Here ‘*paramam gati*’ refers to the abode of Parabrahman, Akṣaradhāma, which is superior to all abodes and the best destination for all liberated selves.”

7.1 *Arcirādi Mārga*: The Way to the Abode of Parabrahman

गतिर्हि त्रिविधा प्रोक्ता ह्युत्तमा मध्यमाऽधमा।

तत्रोत्तमाऽर्चिरादिः स्याद् देवयानेति कीर्तिता ॥SSSK 447॥

“There are three ways through which a self travels after death. The best way that leads to Akṣaradhāma is *Devayana* or *arcirādi mārga*, the second is *Pitrūyan* or *Dhummarg*, where go the persons who have done many charity works. And the third-worst is *Samyanmarg*. Those who have committed sinful acts go to Yamaloka through *samyani mārga*.” *Devayana* or *arcirādi mārga* is the authentic way through it the liberated self goes to the abode of Parabrahman. There is, however, one *nāḍī*, other than the hundred mentioned that lead to the path of lower realms and the Yamaloka, which starting from the navel (*Mūladhārā*) goes past the heart and ends up on the top of the crown when one leaves this physical body. “This is a special *nāḍī* reserved only for a *brahmarūpa* (who attains *mokṣa* at the end of the current life itself) or a *bhakta* whose causal body is burnt (who attains *mokṣa* at the end of the life) he reaches a nil balance in his *kārma* account, which may be at the end of the current life or many lives). Parabrahman illuminates this *nāḍī* at the point where it goes past the heart and the departing self-sensing the flickering radiance leaves the heart and escapes through an aperture like bursting through a push-door into this *nāḍī*.”⁷²² This *nāḍī* is called the ‘*mūrdhanya nāḍī*’, ‘*suṣumṇā nāḍī*’, ‘*brahma nāḍī*’ or ‘*Brahmarandhra*’ since it opens at the top of the skull of the person leading him to Brahman itself through the shining path or the *Arcirādi mārga*. *Arcirādi mārga* is also known as ‘*Devayana*’ or ‘*Brahmapatha*.’ The self starts its journey with the

⁷²² CUSB 5/10/1-2, CU 8/6/5, BU 5/10/1, BG 8/24

help of the Akṣarapuruṣottama this has been described in our scriptures. Through the *Arcirādi* golden path, the *brahmarūpa ekāntik-bhakta* reaches the supreme abode called Akṣaradhāma, where Parabrahman eternally resides.

Svāminārāyaṇa narrates: “After such an *ekāntik bhakta* leaves his body and becomes free of all influences of *māyā*, he attains Akṣaradhāma via the *Archimārg*.” (Vac. Gadh. 1/21, p.61) Moreover, there is no return from it for those who attain it. Niṣkulānanda Svāmī states: “A devotee, who on release, attains the abode of Parabrahman, never has his derailment from the abode into the world of *kārma*-bondage.”⁷²³ The *Gītā* and the *Bhaktacintāmaṇi* reiterate that: “Reaching which they (*muktas*) do not return anymore, is my abode.”⁷²⁴

The BU describes:

ते य एवमेतद्विदुर्ये चामी अरण्ये श्रद्धां सत्यमुपासते
तेऽर्चिरभिसम्भवन्त्यर्चिषोऽहोऽह आपूर्यमाणपक्षं
आपूर्यमाणपक्षाद्यान्षण्मासानुदङ्डादित्य एति मासेभ्यो देवलोकं
देवलोकादादित्यमादित्याद्वैद्युतं तान्वैद्युतान्पुरुषो मानस एत्य
ब्रह्मलोकान् गमयति ते तेषु ब्रह्मलोकेषु पराः परावतो वसन्ति ।
तेषां न पुनरावृत्तिः । (CUSB 5/10/20)

“Those who thus know this *ātman*. (even *Grhasthas*), and those who in the forest worship Akṣarapuruṣottama, go to light (*arka*), from light today, from day to the increasing half, from the increasing half to the six months when the sun goes to the north, from those six months to the world of the *devas* (*devaloka*), from the world of the *Devas* to the sun, from the sun to the place of lightning. When they have thus reached the place of lightning a spirit comes near them and leads them to the worlds of the (conditioned) Brahman, Akṣaradhāma. In these worlds of Brahman, they dwell exalted for ages. There is no returning for them.”

⁷²³ ‘જે ધામને પામીને પ્રાણી પાછું પડવાનું નાથી રે’, ચોશહપદી, નિષ્કુળાનંદ સ્વામી

⁷²⁴ BG 15/6

The same kind of verse with some changes is found in the CU. Where Bhadrēśadāsa explains: “यथोक्तोपासनारूढा भक्ताः स्वात्मसु साक्षादक्षरब्रह्मरूपत्वं संपाद्यार्चिरादिना दिव्यमार्गेण विदेहमुक्त्यवसरे लभन्ते परब्रह्मसहजानन्दनिवासभूतं ब्रह्मधाम इत्याह ते अर्चिषमभिसंभवन्ति इत्यादि” (CUSB 5/10/2, p.221) “The *jīvas*, who are enriched with *Akṣarabrahmabhāva* and offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman will embark upon the journey via divine *Arcirādi* path to Parabrahman’s Akṣaradhāma at the time of *videhamukti*.”

At the end of the physical body of the devotee, Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman, as the main *ativāhika*, come to receive him to His highest abode.⁷²⁵ This is a boon, an assurance given by Parabrahman Himself (Svāminārāyaṇa) to his devotees. Accordingly, moreover, Parabrahman has appointed some *devas* as, *ativāhika*, appear before the departing self, and give their companies and offers various *bhogas* in their midway *lokas*. But the *mukta* is disinterested towards them. He wants to go to the highest abode of Parabrahman, Akṣaradhāma. Then Parabrahman, by his wish, invests him with a divine effulgent *brāhmic* body composed of the stuff called consciousness-bliss (time and place is dependent on His wish). Every released self is carried to the highest abode (Akṣaradhāma) through the *arcirādi* path. It is the golden path of light stretching from the crown of the head to the highest abode. The *muktas* are taken straight (non-stop) to the highest abode in the service of the Lord; however, some of them who had willed (prior to release) to see the ascending stages of *Arcirādi* path are escorted through the gradual holts and receptions enroute on each of the celestial regions, right from Archis to *Brahmaloka*, between the earth and the highest abode (Akṣaradhāma), if Parabrahman, so wills to fulfill his wish.⁷²⁶ Thus, through this *Archimārg*, a liberated self attains Parabrahman.

⁷²⁵ भक्तानां ब्रह्मरूपाणामक्षरपुरुषोत्तमौ । देहपातोत्तरं स्यातां प्रमुखावातिवाहिकौ ॥ SSSK 449 ॥

⁷²⁶ *Arcirādhikaran*, BSSB 4/3/1- 4/3/15, pp.407-415

7.2 Is Oneness With Parabrahman Possible?

This question is one of the most widely asked and discussed in the vivid groups of philosophies and has been extensively answered in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. Although the *akṣaramuktas* attain Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma and attain qualities similar to those of Akṣarabrahman, they do not become the Akṣarabrahman *tattva* itself.⁷²⁷ Similarly, all the *akṣaramuktas* have a form like that of Parabrahman, yet none of them become the Parabrahman *tattva*.⁷²⁸ Then the narration in the scriptures indicates that a devotee attains qualities similar to Parabrahman; this simply means that the *mukta* becomes divine and independent like Parabrahman. As a result, *māyā* is incapable of defeating and binding the *mukta*.⁷²⁹ This is a unique characteristic of this doctrine of liberation in Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana.

Nityānanda Svāmī also asks this question in the *Vacanāmṛta*: “As long as a *mukta* is associated with the *guṇas*, he is affected by places, times, etc. It is accepted, however, that Parabrahman is not influenced by places, times, etc. – even while He remains within the *guṇas*. But when all of the *muktas* are free from the association of the *guṇas*, and having become *nirguṇa*, dwell in Akṣaradhāma along with Parabrahman – who dwells there in the same manner – then all of the *muktas* are *nirguṇa* and composed of *caitanya*. Also, as explained by ‘*mama sādharmaṃyā-āgatāhā*’, they have attained qualities similar to those of Parabrahman.⁷³⁰ How, then, should we understand the distinction between the *muktas* and Parabrahman?” Svāminārāyaṇa provides an appropriate answer: “A king and his servant are both the same in that both are humans, yet the authority, power, beauty, and charm of the king are by far superior. His servant, regardless of how great he may be, cannot achieve what the king can achieve. In the same way, Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa is the all-doer, the cause of all, the controller of all; He

⁷²⁷ We already discussed this factor in the topic- Does *jīva* become Brahman through this oneness?

⁷²⁸ Vac. Kār. 8, Loyā 4, Gadh.3/37, Sār. 11, Kār. 1, Gadh.3/37

⁷²⁹ This principle was also elucidated in the third chapter.

⁷³⁰ It should be understood similar to Akṣarabrahman.

is extremely attractive, extremely radiant, and extremely powerful; also, He possesses the *kartum*, *akartum* and *anyathākartum* powers. If He wishes, He can eclipse all of the *muktas* of Akṣaradhāma by His own divine light and prevail alone.” In this way, Svāminārāyaṇa maintains the vital ontological distinction between liberated selves and Parabrahman in various discourses.⁷³¹ The SB also reveals the same truth. The verse reads:

तदा विद्वान् पुण्यपापे विधूय

निरञ्जनः परमं साम्यमुपैति ॥ MU 3/1/3॥

“One who knows Parabrahman transcended even Akṣara removes all his miseries and attains the similarity of Him.”⁷³² Bhadrēśadāsa comments: “साम्यमुपैतीत्युक्तिः बद्धावस्थायां मोक्षावस्थायां वा सर्वदा परमात्मनो जीवेश्वरात्मतः तत्त्वभेदं विज्ञातुमेवा” (MUSB 3/1/3, p.284) “The verse ‘*samyam upaiti*’ explains itself that there must be a difference between Parabrahman and *jīva-īśvara* either in the bondage state or in the liberated state.” The purpose and purport of writing this statement is clear that the word ‘similar’ itself brings two different entities. As Bhadrēśadāsa acknowledges: “स्वरूपाभेदे साम्यं नोपपद्येत साम्यस्य भेद निबन्धनत्वात्” “Similarity never occurs which is already one entity; therefore, the term itself brings two different entities.” In the above descriptions on the *mukti-mimāṃsā* (in-depth reflections on liberation) in Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana, it is important to draw attention to the clear fact that in Akṣaradhāma, the *akṣaramuktas* maintain a distinct, individual existence. Unlike light, which merges in light, or water, which merges with water, the *akṣaramuktas* do not merge into either Akṣarabrahman or Parabrahman; they do not lose their own individuality.⁷³³ However, sometimes the *Śruti* describes

यथा नद्यः स्यन्दमानाः समुद्रेऽस्तं गच्छन्ति नामरूपे विहाय ।

तथा विद्वान् नामरूपाद्विमुक्तः परात्परं पुरुषमुपैति दिव्यम् ॥ MU 3/2/8॥

⁷³¹ Vac. Sār.11, Kār. 1, Loyā.13, Gadh. 2/38 and Gadh. 3/3

⁷³² अत इदं परमं साम्यं खलु ब्रह्माक्षर साधर्म्यान्नान्तरिच्यते (MUSB 3/1/3, p.284)

⁷³³ Vac. Gadh. 2/38, Gadh. 3/33

“As the flowing rivers disappear in the sea, losing their name and their form; thus a wise man, freed from name and form, goes to the divine Parabrahman, who is greater than the great Akṣarabrahman.” After hearing such an analogy one can imagine that the liberated self must merge into Parabrahman, but Bhadrēśadāsa strongly refutes this position.

The Bhāṣyakāra elaborately discusses this topic and provides many arguments and states, “A person who knows that a liberated self merges into the form of Parabrahman, it is his delusion. “केचन भ्रान्तिमवतिष्ठते...अत्र नामरूपप्रहाणमात्रे तात्पर्यं न तु तत्त्वस्वरूपप्रहाणे अपीति ज्ञेयम्”(MUSB 3/2/8, p.298) in reality the liberated self renounces the worldly or *māyic* name and form, not he waives its eternal form.” Through being profoundly and lovingly attached to the divine form of Parabrahman or Puruṣottama, the *akṣaramuktas* remain immersed within his *murti*. Despite having their own independent existence, they have no awareness of it and are totally engrossed in the bliss of Parabrahman's *darśana*.⁷³⁴

The devotee finds the highest fulfillment in the unitive taste of oneness with Parabrahman, without losing its separateness and his relationship with Parabrahman as His devout servant. Thus, Svāminārāyaṇa takes care of logical and intellectual need for unity, emotional and psychological need for enjoying unalloyed bliss and moral and spiritual need for mystic union despite separate existence. Hence, both in the pre and post emancipated states, Parabrahman and *jīvātman* are distinct but not divorceable; they are one and inseparable psychologically, but distinct and separate actually.

As Dr. S. Rādhākṛṣṇana points out, “The *Taittirīya* UP, makes out that the liberated self feels his oneness with Parabrahman, but it is not absorbed in the Absolute. It is

⁷³⁴ MuU 3/1/3, BG 4.10 and BG 14/2. See also BS-SB 2/2/18 p.326; BS-SB 4/2/15, p. 402; BS-SB 4/4/4, p. 419; BS-SB 4/4/17, pp. 427-428; MuU-SB 3/2/7-8 p.297-298; MuU-SB 3/1/3, p.284; BG-SB 4/10, pp. 97-98; BG-SB 14/2, pp.292-293.

the unity of spirit but not of substance.”⁷³⁵ The same truth, in line with the *Śruti*, Svāminārāyaṇa alleges. He holds that the *mukta* lovingly gets absorbed in the absolute (i.e. Puruṣottama-Nārāyaṇa), the fountainhead of unalloyed bliss. How can a released self attain *sārūpya* i.e. similarity of form, if Parabrahman does not have any form? The scriptures proclaim in unambiguous terms that released selves attain similarly (*sāmya*), with Parabrahman having form and complexion of golden hue.

The *Śruti* proclaims: i.e., he who attains me, attains similarity with me. He attains characteristics resembling me. If a liberated self attains (similarity) with Parabrahman, how can he ever serve Him? It may be pointed out that the Akṣarabrahman who is eternally free, who has form resembling Parabrahman, who has most of the characteristics similar to Parabrahman, serves Him in the best manner from eternity with servile-devotion. In the like manner, every freed self acquires form similar to Parabrahman and has most characteristics resembling Parabrahman. Nevertheless, they emulate or model Akṣarabrahman in serving Parabrahman devoutly and deriving the joy of servile-devotion. Thus, liberated selves acquire the characteristics similar to Akṣarabrahman, who is eternally free and the best among the devotees.⁷³⁶

7.3 The Body of a *Mukta* in Akṣaradhāma

However, upon death, having shed its material body, the self does not forever remain formless in Akṣaradhāma. Svāminārāyaṇa explains in Vac. Gadh. 3/7 that like Parabrahman, who possesses a definite form there, the liberated devotees in his service also possess a form. What is this form of the liberated self in Akṣaradhāma?

This is the question posed to Svāminārāyaṇa in Vac. Gadh. 2/66. He replies: “When the *jīva*’s ignorance is dispelled, its association with the three *māyic* bodies is

⁷³⁵ Rādhākṛṣṇana S.S., Eastern Religions And Western Thought. oxford University Press, London, 1940, p.132,

⁷³⁶ BGSB 14/2

broken. Thereafter, the *jīva* remains as pure consciousness and existence. Then, by Parabrahman's will, the *jīva* receives a body composed of sentiency (*caitanya prakṛti*), which is distinct from the eight inert elements (*jada prakṛti*) of Parabrahman, i.e. earth, water, etc. With that body, then, it resides in Parabrahman's Akṣaradhāma.” In answer to a similar question in Vac. Gadh. 1/1- “What type of body does a devotee of Parabrahman attain when he leaves his physical body, which is composed of the five material elements and goes to the abode of Parabrahman?” Svāminārāyaṇa replies that such a devotee receives, ‘by the will of Parabrahman’, a *brāhmic* body, what he calls here a ‘*brahmanāyā tanu*’. Bhadreśadāsa corroborates:

प्राप्य नवां तनुं ब्राह्मीं परात्माऽऽकारसंनिभाम्।

नित्यद्विभुजपादादिदिव्यकरणसंयुताम् ॥ SSSK 438 ॥

“In *videhamukti*, the released self resides in Akṣaradhāma, having attained a new body that is made of *brahmatattva*. This new body looks just like that of Paramātmā, meaning that it eternally possesses two arms, feet other divine instruments of action.” The BS brings forth a critical argument regarding whether the *mukta* attains a new divine body in the abode of Parabrahman or not? The Bhāṣyakāra gives a fine solution by applying *sūtra*’s own words:

सम्पद्याविर्भावः स्वेन शब्दात् ॥BC 4/4/1॥

“Through the words of the CU, it is proved that there is an emergence of a divine body to the *jīva* in the abode of Parabrahman.” The Bhāṣyakāra comments: “ब्रह्मरूपस्य परोपाकस्य विदेहमुक्तौ ब्राह्म वपुर्लक्षणं नवतरं दिव्यरूपमभिनिष्पद्यते” (BSSB 4/4/1, p.416) “One who is *brahmarūpa* and offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman attains new divine *brāhmika* body in the *videhamukti* state.” In this way, a seeker attains this *brāhmic* body. Now we will analyze the form of this body. Well, there is no possibility, nor any need for any other kind of body-form other than similar to Parabrahman in the state of liberation. Every *mukta* is given the body composed of divine material of the substance of consciousness-bliss and this body is exactly analogous to teen-aged form (*sadā-kiśora-murti-rūpa*) of Parabrahman because this is the original form of

Parabrahman and the *Śruti* says '*Svena rupeṇa*' *abhiniṣpadyate*⁷³⁷ and '*mama bhavamāgatā*'.⁷³⁸ So, whatever original (*mūla*) form (*rūpa*) of Parabrahman is there, the similar equally divine, glorious form every *mukta* gets through His grace. Parabrahman Himself comes to receive the liberated self to His abode, and en-route Akṣaradhāma. He invests the freed self with a divine-effulgent body of *brahma tattva* (the stuff of consciousness-bliss).

This he, (a *mukta*) gets from Parabrahman on the perish of the subtle physical body only after acquiring brahmanhood. Of course, in the highest abode of Parabrahman (*parama dhāma*/ Akṣaradhāma) there is no scope for any other form (or any other type of body), because it alone exists eternally also after final destruction (*mahāpralaya* /*ātyantikapralaya*); and in *mahāpralaya* (final dissolution) all other names and forms except that of Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and *muktas* are doomed through destruction.⁷³⁹ This makes one more thing clear logically and spiritually that only divine form-personality (Brahman-Parabrahman) alone is beyond the limitations of space and time (*prakṛti*-names and forms); and as the *muktas* are dowered with Parabrahman-like divine body-form, they exist imperishably.

Although the *muktas* are similar to Parabrahman in possession of body-form and characteristics, there is an important difference. The unique differentia of Parabrahman is- He is the inner ruler of all, He is the controller, creator-sustainer-destroyer of an infinite number of universes, He alone is exclusively independent, and supreme controller and supporter of all. His perfection, divinity, glory, and power are infinite, unconditional, independent, and *causa Sui*. This is not the case with *muktas*, because theirs is everything conditional, dependent and derived from

⁷³⁷ CU 8/12/2

⁷³⁸ BG 4/10

⁷³⁹ MU 3/2/8

Parabrahman. This retains the master-servant, worshipped-worshipper relationship intact between Parabrahman and *muktas*. This further implies that the shine, luster, and effulgence of Parabrahman are exceedingly superior and marvelous to that of the *muktas*.⁷⁴⁰ Consequently, the transcendence and the supreme majesty of Parabrahman remains unmatched and unexcelled.

Bhadreśadāsa expresses this view in the BS by quoting the *sūtra*: अतः एव च अनन्याधिपतिः.⁷⁴¹ It reads that there is the only controller of *mukta* is Parabrahman. Thus *muktas* become free from *kāla*, *kārma*, and *māyā* but remain independent to Parabrahman forever. The oft-emphasized illustration says that a worm is converted into a honey-bee by a bee, which implies that the *ksetrajña jīvātman* remains the same while the body of the honey-bee is acquired. On the same analogy, the atomic *ātman* remains the same while discarding the *kārma*-born material body; it acquires a new divine body composed of *parā-prakṛti*, i.e. effulgent *aprakṛta*-substance of the nature of consciousness-bliss.

It cannot be held that in the state of *mokṣa jīvātman* undergoes transformation and gets into the shape of a divine body, because when the *jīvātman* did not undergo any change or transformation in the state of bondage, how can it ever undergo change and become body shaped with parts and limbs in the state of liberation? Therefore, on this issue, Svāminārāyaṇa says: “After leaving this physical body, when *ātman* goes to the abode of Parabrahman on achieving *mokṣa*, it acquires a new body of the nature of brahman (consciousness-light) by the will and grace of Parabrahman.”⁷⁴² At the loss of the physical body, an emancipated *jīvātman* with the body composed of effulgent-consciousness attains the service of Parabrahman in His abode. Moreover, the words '*caitanya-ni-murti*'⁷⁴³ is interpreted in the

⁷⁴⁰ Vac. Gadh. 2/13; 3/31, 38

⁷⁴¹ BS 4/4/9, with Parabrahman Aksharbrahman is also controller of *muktas*. Here is the context of Parabrahman.

⁷⁴² Vac. Gadh. 1/1

⁷⁴³ Vac. Gadh. 1/37

commentary as the body of the nature of Brahman. It is the extremely effulgent being-consciousness bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda tattva/dravyam*). It is called ‘*sat-cit-ānanda*’ also because the word ‘*sat*’ here means eternal-indestructible (*nitya*) ‘*cit*’ means of the nature of effulgence (*jyotirupa*) and *ananda* because the body is pleasantly agreeable.

As explicated in the *Vacanāmṛta* that when the *jīva*, becomes *brahmrupe* and departs from this worldly body, by the will and resolve of Parabrahman, it acquires Brahman-like celestial divine body through the *parā prakṛti*. On this issue, *Vacanāmṛta* explicitly says that when the *jīva* gets rid of its attachment with threefold (gross, subtle, causal) bodies, and the *ātman* exists as conscious principle per se, it is invested with a body composed of Brahman distinct from the material *prakṛti* of 24 elements. Through the immense grace of Parabrahman, the *jīva* acquires this *brahmic* body and enjoys the bliss of Parabrahman.⁷⁴⁴ Bhadreśadāsa also confirms while commenting on the BG. The verse reads:

अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।

जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥ BG 7/5॥

“My other higher entity is the *Para Prakṛti*, which is different from the insentient *prakṛti* and by which this entire universe is sustained, O Arjuna.” The Bhāṣyakāra provides the explicit reason that “एवं विदेहमुक्तावक्षरब्रह्माख्यपरप्रकृतेरेव मुक्तानां दिव्यब्राह्मदेहस्य निर्माणत्वात्” (BGSB 7/5, p.158) “*Aparaprakṛiti* here implies Akṣarabrahman because, in *videhmukti*, only Akṣarabrahman can compose the *brāhmic* body for *muktas*.” Here, the meaning of ‘*parā prakṛti*’ is explained as ‘*akṣarabrahmātmaka-parāprakṛti*’ and the meaning of the word ‘*deha*’ is given as ‘*brahmanmāyā tanuḥ*’, and the meaning of ‘*samyujyate*’ is brought forward as ‘*tadabhisamayukto bhavati*’. This explication in the commentary makes one more point clear: the *jivātman* (with ‘I-sense’ of *ahamārtha*) and the body (*brahmanmāyā tanu*), it possesses, are two different things,

⁷⁴⁴ Vac. Gadh. 2/66

so the body-self distinction of a different kind still prevails. So, the possessor-possessed relation remains between the two.

Caitanya prakṛti is not *jīva rūpa prakṛti* but it is *parā prakṛti* known as *aksarabrahmātka prakṛti* out of which the bodies of *muktas* are composed. Vach. Sar.14 says: “Casting the physical body on earth, when *jīvātman* becomes free from it. Parabrahman dowers him a new body called ‘*Bhāgavati-taṇu*’ with which the *mukta-jīva* resides in the abode of Parabrahman. This once again spells out the ‘body-self’ relation which persists at the level of *parama pāda*. When the *mukta-jīva* acquires a divine body of the nature of light-consciousness, he then becomes capable to distinguish between himself, other *muktas*, Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman.”

Thus, each *mukta* is a knower and enjoyer with uncontaminated pure ‘I-sense’, by his own divine body. The forms- personalities of Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and the released selves (*muktas* i.e. *pārśadas*) are true (real), divine, and extremely effulgent. All of them have a body form like that of ‘*Puruṣa*’ (Parabrahman Himself) endowed with two hands.⁷⁴⁵ The Bhāṣyakāra elaborates: “एवमेवेष सम्प्रसादो देहात्मविवेकी प्रागुक्तापहतपाप्मत्वादिगुणविशिष्टो ब्रह्मरूपः परब्रह्मोपासको मुक्तात्मा अस्माच्छरीरात् प्रारब्धलब्धान्श्वराद् देहात् समुत्थाय निष्क्रम्याऽचिरादिदिव्यमार्गेण परं ज्योतिः दिव्यप्रभासमानाऽक्षरधामस्थितपरमदिव्यतेजस्विनं परमात्मानम् उपसम्पद्य प्राप्य स्वेन रूपेणाऽभिनिष्पद्यते स्वेन ब्राह्मण दिव्यविग्रहरूपेण निष्पन्नो भवति। ब्राह्मतनुयुक्तः सन् सदैव परमात्मपरमदिव्यसुखं दिव्याऽक्षरधामन्यनुभवतीत्यर्थः।” (CUSB 8/12/2, pp.386-387)

“A *brahmarūpa* devotee with the divine qualities who can discern between the body and the *ātman* offers *upāsanā* to Parabrahman. After leaving his physical mortal body, he trends on the divine *Arcirādi* path and attains Parabrahman in His abode. At this moment, this liberated self enriches with the divine *brāhmika* body and continuously experiences the bliss of Parabrahman.” A *mukta* worships and serves

⁷⁴⁵ Vac. Gadh. 3/38

Parabrahman clothed in a divine body that has non-material, senses, mind, vital breath etc. It is the body composed of the substance of the nature of effulgent consciousness-bliss. BS 4/4/10, (*abhāvam bādarirōh hyevam*) raises a doubt whether released selves acquire the vivid pleasures in the abode or not? But the Bhāṣyakāra strongly refutes this position, that there is any possibility of such pleasure items. In other words, the *mukta* becomes devoid of *kārma* born *prakṛta* material body (*aśariri*); and acquires *kārma* free non-material (*aprākṣta*) body (*śarīra*). This is the view of *Bādarāyaṇa* in BS. 4/4/12. This divine body is eternal, (*sarge'pi nopajāyante pralaye vyathanti ca*), devoid of production and destruction even at every periodical creation and dissolution.⁷⁴⁶

There is one more way in which the problem of *mukta*'s *divya-śarīra* is viewed. When the *jīvātman* departs from its mortal-physical body, rises above, it receives a new divine body from Parabrahman. Thus, Parabrahman gives him a new divine body which is of the nature-&-stuff of lustrous-consciousness. Here, the words 'gets' and 'gives' are not used in the conventional sense of getting or giving a visible-tangible material object from one hand into another. Here, the words 'gets' or 'gives' is used to imply that a divine body comes forth (*āvirbhavati*) from the personality of Parabrahman by His will. That is why, it is termed to suggest-'just as the Guru gives knowledge (*jñāna*) to a *śiṣya* (i.e. unveils truth). Similarly, the *bhāgavati tanu* is given. The Antaryāmī Paramātmā (may also), by His extraordinary divine power, can make *bhāgavati tanu* become manifest (*avirbhāva*) from inside for the *mukta-jīva*. It is called '*bhāgavati tanu*', because the body resembles the form (*vigraha*) of Brahman, and also because it is dowered (or endowed) by Parabrahman out of His sweet will graciously. (*Bhagavat eva bhāgavati murti, Bhagavān-murtisamāna-murti, bhagavadeccchaya-prāpta-tatsam-murti.*) In this way, for a *jīvātman* who now has become pure-consciousness, a

⁷⁴⁶ BSSB 4/4/10-4/4/12, pp.422-424

permanent-unchanging (*dhruva/ kutastha*) divine body (*divya-deha*) is formulated (made manifest) by the will of Parabrahman.

The body of the nature of Puruṣottama manifests for *jivātman*, having a form similar to Parabrahman, and it is everlasting and identical; and yet the knower and enjoyer of Lord and His bliss, it is a perfectly symmetrical beautiful body endowed with all abilities fully consummated. It is the body in which as if the knower, the known, and the knowledge are fused together like a single entity! The *premākārṣaṇa* (Love-Attraction) of the Puruṣottama is supreme, infinite, and indescribable. In such a most lustrous *satcidānandamāyā murti* of Parabrahman, the *jivātman* is attracted and lost totally in Him out of highest love and devotion for Him. As a response to his psychological (merger) union with Paramātman, from Him out of overflowing grace and will, the *jivātman* receives (has a manifestation of) the Parabrahman-like divine lustrous body. He makes him acquire it. As a mother confers a similar form to a baby, so does Parabrahman bestow on him a divine form (body) similar to His own.

It is a '*guṇa-dravyam-caitanya-ākṛti*' i.e. a body of nature and effulgent consciousness. This 'lustrous-consciousness' out of which the body is made, pervades perfectly within the confines of the body-shape wholly and does not flow out or exceed it, nor does it leave any point or portion of body unpervaded within it. Here, an illustration given as a pointer (and not for literal application) is - just as water turns into the shape of an ice-cube, and thus acquires the features-properties of ice. Similarly, all the characteristics and features of Parabrahman's personality are acquired by the released self (with the exception of the qualities and powers of His supreme exclusive transcendence, as stated in *Svetā Up.* 6/16). In short, the *mukta* acquires a perfect-permanent body resembling Parabrahman Himself.

When the supreme Puruṣottama makes a divine body manifest (for a liberated *jivātman*) out of Brahman, does it indicate any change (*vikārah*) and loss or diminution (*kṣayah/hrāsah*) in His personality? The answer is no. Parabrahman's form-personality is of the nature of consciousness-bliss, which is eternal and unique. Uniform, unchanging, undiminishing, infinite, and perfect. So, despite the attainment of perfection from Him by innumerable released selves, His perfection remains unique, infinite, and undiminished. The devotee endowed with *upāsanā*, self-knowledge, Parabrahman-knowledge, the strength of Parabrahman's divine nature and the state of likeness with Akṣarabrahman is blessed by a divine Parabrahman-like body (*Bhāgavati-taṇu*) at the loss of his physical body and reaches the highest abode called *Brahmadhāma* (*parama dhāma*).

Bhadreśadāsa draws upon this when commenting on the *Upaniṣads*. He explains that when the self leaves the body and reaches the supremely glorious form of Parabrahman in the divinely luminous Akṣaradhāma, it receives a divine, *Brāhmika* body { *divyabrāhmavighraha*; *brāhmatanu* } in which it continuously experiences the divine bliss of Parabrahman. This is analogously and even more explicitly stated in BU 4/4/4:⁷⁴⁷

तद्यथा पेशस्करी पेशसो मात्रामपादायान्यन्नवतरं कल्याणतरं

रूपं तनुत एवमेवायमात्मेदं शरीरं निहत्याविद्यां

गमयित्वाऽन्यन्नवतरं कल्याणतरं रूपं कुरुते पित्र्यं वा

गान्धर्वं वा दैवं वा प्राजापत्यं वा ब्राह्मं वाऽन्येषां वा भूतानाम् ॥ (BU 4/4/4)

“As a goldsmith takes a piece of gold and turns it into another, newer, more beautiful form, in the same way, this self, having discarded this body and dispelled its ignorance, receives another, newer, more beautiful ... *brāhmi* form.”

⁷⁴⁷ See BU-SB 4.4.4, pp.268-269 for a fuller explanation of this verse, where it relates the *brahmarūpa mukta* receiving a *brāhmasarira* for enjoying Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma, whereas other, less elevated selves will receive other types of bodies as they enjoy the pleasures of lesser abodes. Despite these similarities, the liberated selves remain ontologically distinct from Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.

Elaborating upon this new form in Vac. Gadh. 3/38, Svāminārāyaṇa speaks of it alongside Parabrahman's form in the following way: “The form of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma and the form of the *muktas* - the attendants of Parabrahman - are all real, divine, and extremely luminous. Also, the form of that Parabrahman and those *muktas* is two-armed like that of a human being, and it is characterized by eternal existence, consciousness, and bliss.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/38) Going even further in likening the *muktas* form with Parabrahman’s human-shaped form, Svāminārāyaṇa calls theirs a ‘Parabrahmanly body’, or ‘*bhāgavati tanu*’ (Vac. Sār.14). The climax of this similarity is found in Vac. Kār.1, where Svāminārāyaṇa states that the liberated selves, due to their knowledge of Parabrahman, assume a form like Parabrahman's form. That is, he explains, ‘they become divine’.

Being divine and composed solely of consciousness means that the liberated selves are without any of the distinctions of name and form possible only with *māyic* materiality. In other words, the forms in Akṣaradhāma of Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and all liberated selves are virtually identical, with the *muktas* themselves being visually indistinguishable from one another (even while retaining their ontological individuality). Another reason for this is that the forms of the *muktas* are genderless, just as the selves themselves are (Vac. Gadh. 3/22). In a sermon recorded in SV 7/2, Svāminārāyaṇa explains: “The form of a *mukta* is different from the two genders of the world. It is neither female in shape nor male in shape. It has a wholly *brāhmic* body, which is neither feminine nor masculine.”

This also helps explain that, even while having a human-shaped form - complete with senses, inner faculties, etc. - the fact that it is divine, *Brāhmika*, and composed entirely of consciousness, the liberated selves are devoid of any human functions

and urges. Having transcended *māyā*, they are beyond hunger, thirst, fatigue, etc., and free of all forms of mundane passions.⁷⁴⁸

7.4 *Upasya-Upasaka* Relationship

The liberated self (*mukta*) attains similarity with Parabrahman (and Akṣarabrahman) in terms of His nature and qualities. Although the *mukta* attains the figure or form like that of Parabrahman, yet as far as the divine qualities are concerned, he attains them like that of Akṣarabrahman. Whatever he possesses, the brahman-qualities cover all stuff.⁷⁴⁹ After acquiring such type of greatness, the *mukta* seems capable like Parabrahman even though he is distinct from Parabrahman. If there is no oneness between *mukta* and Parabrahman, then, the question may arise, what kind of relationship occurs between Parabrahman and the *muktas*? The *Vacanāmṛta* also elaborates on this question. “After all, that devotee of Parabrahman then becomes independent, just like Parabrahman. He also becomes free from the shackles of *kāla*, *kārma*, and *māyā* - just like Parabrahman. Therefore, what difference remains so that the master-servant relationship is maintained? This is my question.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/67, pp.525-526) Svāminārāyaṇa provides here a unique answer that solves this widely discussed question amongst the various philosophers.

He replies: “When that devotee leaves his body and goes to the abode of Parabrahman, he attains charm and powers based on the extent to which he has realized the majesty of Parabrahman. Despite this, that devotee still feels Parabrahman’s majesty in the form of His powers, charm, etc., to be much greater. He then realizes, ‘Parabrahman has granted me just as many divine powers and as much charm as I had realized in Him. Yet, Parabrahman’s divine powers and charm appear to be totally limitless. Like me, countless others have also attained qualities

⁷⁴⁸ “अभावं बादरिराह ह्येवम्” BSSB 4/4/10, pp.422-423

⁷⁴⁹ BGSB 4/10, p.97

similar to that of Parabrahman, yet, no one is capable of becoming like Parabrahman.” (Vac. Gadh. 2/67, p.526)

This devotional relationship between Parabrahman and the liberated selves is thus referred to as the ‘*Svāmi-sevaka sambandha* (master-servant relationship) by *Svāminārāyaṇa*.⁷⁵⁰ In this way, Svāminārāyaṇa acknowledges that the servant-master relationship always remains whether in the abode or on earth. The SSS bolsters:

निमग्नाः सहजानन्दे प्रगाढाऽऽनन्दसेविताः।

कुर्वाणा ब्रह्मभावाऽऽद्यां तद्भक्तिं दासभावतः॥ SSSK 440 ॥

“Immersed in Parabrahman, they enjoy profound bliss. They offer devotion to Him with humility and *brahmabhāva*.” Though a *mukta* becomes pure and sinless, he becomes free from faults, vices, and blemishes forever. He becomes free forever from the *saṃsāra*-the cycles of birth and death. His *dharmabhutajnāna* (attributive-consciousness) becomes fully expanded, all-pervading, and unobstructed. He becomes omniscient. Whatever he wills, happens. He comes to possess the power of realizing his wish unconditionally, immediately. He acquires the power to freely move about everywhere at his will and can present himself in any form, in any world or abode, without resorting to any means. He becomes the self-ruler and is not ruled by anyone except Parabrahman. Even when he goes to any other *brahmānda*, he does it by assuming an additional form, with the original form kept intact in the service of Parabrahman in the highest abode.

The *Śrutis* and *Smṛtis* also mention the abilities of a *mukta*:

“यः सर्वज्ञः सर्वो भवति”(PU 4/10)

स सर्वज्ञ सर्वमेवाविवेश”(PU 4/11)

⁷⁵⁰ Vac. Kār.10 and Loyā. 1 (Vac. Gadh. 1/21, Loyā.13, Gadh. 3/37).

“ते सर्वगं सर्वतः प्राप्य धीराः युक्तात्मानः सर्वमेवाविशन्ति” (MU 3/2/5)

“स सर्वविद्भजति मां सर्वभावेन भारत” (BG 15/19)

These texts highlight *mukta*'s capacity to become an all-knower and his power to go everywhere, wherever he wishes. Moreover,

यं यमन्तमभिकामो भवति यं कामं कामयते सोऽस्य

संकल्पादेव समुत्तिष्ठति तेन सम्पन्नो महीयते ॥ (CU 8/2/10)

Whatever object the *mukta* is attached to, whatever object he desires, by his mere will, it comes to him, and having obtained it, he is happy. However, his will is always in consonance with the will of his Lord, he becomes free forever in all respects; nevertheless, he never uses his freedom without the will of Parabrahman. Now he is under the sway and command of his Parabrahman alone. He voluntarily refrains himself from using his freedom because, for him, the enjoyment of the nectarine bliss of the Supreme Lord is the greatest value than anything else. He knows that- “my Master (Parabrahman) is infinitely transcendent to me, and all my freedom, powers, excellence and divinity are due to Him.’ This awareness retains the relationship of ‘servant-master’, ‘*bhakta-Bhagavān*’, he, therefore, remembers that: I am the servitor of my Lord.”

The BSSB states: “यथोक्तमुक्तैश्वर्यप्रदर्शनं परमात्मकृपालब्धतत्सामर्थ्यसूचनमात्राभिप्रायेण। वस्तुतस्तु तदानीं तस्य ब्रह्मरूपेण स्वात्मना परमात्मपरमानन्दपरमदिव्यानुभूतिनिमग्नत्वात् तदितरसंकल्पानवकाशात् तादृशसामर्थ्यलाभेपि न स स्वातन्त्र्येण तद् विनियुक्ते। न वा तथाविधं किमपि कामयते इति” (BSSB 4/4/8, p.422) “Whatever has described the infinitive power which a *mukta* attains, should be known as the capacity of him. However, the *mukta* is *brahmarūpa*, and after attaining Akṣaradhāma he is deeply engrossed in the divine bliss of Parabrahman, there is nothing else in which he wishes to indulge in. Moreover, his all potency depends on Parabrahman; he does not use it freely nor does he wish anything after attaining Parabrahman, because now he is fulfilled in every aspect.”⁷⁵¹

⁷⁵¹ CUSB 8/2/10, p.350

The term ‘*nitya-mukta*’ in its strict sense means eternally free, and it applies only to Brahman (Akṣara) and Parabrahman (Puruṣottama), for they alone are eternally unbound and beyond the three *guṇas* of *māyā-prakṛti*. This further implies that the term ‘*mukta*’ applies to those *jīvas/īśvaras* who were once bound, and have achieved emancipation through proper efforts. Both Brahman and Parabrahman are from eternity beyond *māyā-prakṛti* and its three *guṇas*. Thus, they are ever pure, unbound, and free. Both are eternally free, omniscient, immanent, and supporters of a multitude of universes (*brahmāndas*).⁷⁵²

Akṣarabrahman differs from liberated selves because his knowledge of Parabrahman is eternally expanded without any obscuration whatsoever. His knowledge of Parabrahman was never in a contracted state. It has always been in an expanded state and shall be so forever.⁷⁵³ Parabrahman, Akṣara-brahman, and *muktas* (released souls) have resemblance in terms of similarity of forms (*samāna-vigraha*), the resemblance in terms of being transcendent to *māyā-prakṛti*, the resemblance in terms of autonomy or ability to freely move about (incarnate) in any world, the resemblance in terms of being untouched and unbound by the limitations of the worldly existence.⁷⁵⁴

As far as the difference is concerned, between *mukta* and Akṣara-Puruṣottama, in *dyubhvaadhikāraṇa* (BS 1/3/7) and (CU 7/24/1), the joy and happiness arising in the experience of the Supreme Infinite are described as an experience of supreme bliss par excellence. In the ‘*Ānādamāyādhikāraṇa*’ (BS 1/1/13-20), we find the strong and categorical pronouncement of the identity and difference in terms of *ānanda* between *jīva* and Parabrahman. The study of *Vacanāmṛta* sār.17, kār.10, Gadh. 2/31, Loyā. 15, Gadh. 3/38 helps in bringing out the distinction between

⁷⁵² Vac. *Rahashya* 2, p.15

⁷⁵³ Vac. *Rahashya* 3, p.67-68

⁷⁵⁴ BSSB 4/4/19, p.429

Parabrahman and *muktas* together with the transcendence of Akṣara-Puruṣottama. A *mukta jīva* has acquired perfection by the grace of infinitely perfect Lord. The Lord is such an ocean of infinite perfection that even when an infinite number of *jīvas* acquire perfection through Him, His perfection does not diminish even by the least. Therefore, even if all *mukta-jīvas* are put together, they cannot exhaust the transcendence of Parabrahman even by an infinitesimal portion.

True, *mukta-jīvas* acquire similarity (*sādharmya/sāmya*) with Akṣara-Puruṣottama and consequently acquire nature, qualities, majesty, and freedom like him. However, they never acquire Parabrahman's qualities of transcendence as described in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6/16. The supreme powers of *sarvāntaryāmitva*, *sarvasākṣitva*, *sarvaniyāmakatva*, *sarva dhāraakatva*, *sarva-vyāpakatva*, *sarvatantra-svatantratva*, (esp., and *anyathākartum-Śakti*) exclusively rest with Akṣara-Puruṣottama. They are the foundational qualities of Akṣara-Puruṣottama's transcendence.

It should be noted that even Akṣarabrahman is a permanent *upasaka* or servant of Parabrahman.⁷⁵⁵ So do the *mukta-jīvas*, despite being similar in appearance to Parabrahman, they are the servant devotees, while Parabrahman (Puruṣottama) is their master and the supreme object of devotion. All *mukta-jīvas*, though resemble in terms of nature, form, and qualities with Parabrahman; they differ from Him immeasurably in terms of shine, luster, powers and glory. This is the basis of 'sevakasvāmi', 'dāsa-dāsyā', 'upasaka-upāsyā' relationship.

The liberated selves (*mukta-jīvas*) resemble one another in terms of their equality of status, qualities, and majesty. They differ from Akṣarabrahman, who is the supreme devotee and supports an infinite number of universes from eternity. The

⁷⁵⁵ Vac. Loyā. 13

distinction between the *muktas* and the Lord is significantly very great because *muktas* are many; while their Lord is one; and they are His worshippers while He is the worshipped. Allegorically speaking, the shine, luster, and glory of all *muktas* taken together can hardly match an infinitesimal portion of a body-hair of Akṣarapuruṣottama; even though *muktas* do not maintain *upasaka-upasyabhāva* with Akṣarabrahman, instead they maintain this relationship with Parabrahman only.⁷⁵⁶

That is why the Bhāṣyakāra states: “अतो मुक्तावपि सेव्यसेवकभावो नोच्छिद्यते इति रहस्यं विज्ञापयितुकाम इह सूत्रकारः”(BSSB 3/3/25, p.331) “Thus, even in the state of *mukti*, the relation of *sevyā sevaka* never subsides, this is all explained by the author of the *Brahmasūtra*.” In this way, despite the *mukti avasthā*, the master-servant relationship never subsides between Parabrahman and *mukta*. It means the *mukta* remains *upasaka* and Parabrahman *upasaka* forever. This is the secret of the scriptures.

7.5 The Role of *Muktas* in Akṣaradhāma

Here a question arises: So, then, after being as the servant, *das* or *upāsaka* what do they actually do in Akṣaradhāma?

Svāminārāyaṇa makes clear that because the *muktas* are absolutely perfect and fulfilled. They have no reason to strive for anything, nor anything further to strive for. They are now and forever in the direct fellowship of Parabrahman, who, Svāminārāyaṇa adds, “is always present there (in Akṣaradhāma) to bestow supreme bliss upon those *muktas*.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/38) The liberated selves thus have no need or desire for anything else. They remain fully engrossed in Parabrahman alone, continuously experiencing his supremely blissful self. Because his bliss is so inexhaustibly rich and everlastingly gratifying, there is never an instance of the

⁷⁵⁶ Vac. Gadh. 1/64

muktas being bored or satiated, and so they are continuously engaged in as Svāminārāyaṇa describes it, “the *darśana*’ of Parabrahman.” (Vac. Loyā. 14).

‘*Darśana*’, can be taken here to mean literally seeing Parabrahman (for the *muktas* do have divine, *Brāhmika* senses and faculties, just like Parabrahman), and also, more deeply, as having the vision or realization of Parabrahman, i.e. experiencing him and thus enjoying his presence. Indeed, when elaborating upon the following phrase in PU 5/5,

“स एतस्माज्जीवघनात् परात्परं पुरिशयं पुरुषमीक्षते” (PU 5/5)

“That *mukta* sees Puruṣottama, supreme among all living beings, dwelling in that abode.” Bhadrēśadāsa chooses to render the verb ‘*iksate*’ “साक्षात्करोति” (literally, to see) as ‘*sākṣātkaroti*’, i.e. to directly realize. He further mentions: “यथा दण्डविशिष्टं पुरुषमीक्षत इत्युक्ते दण्डोपीक्षणकर्म भवति तथैवेह जीवघनपरभूताक्षरब्रह्मपरत्वविशिष्टपुरुषमीक्षता” (PUSB 5/5, p.219)

“As one sees a person with a stick, that means the stick also becomes the object of the sentence like the persons. Similarly, a liberated self, when it looks at Parabrahman with Akṣarabrahman, Akṣarabrahman is also included as the object of the sentence.” While such seeing or realization is sometimes framed as ‘service’ (*Sevā*) or the *mukta* described as an ‘attendant’ (*sevaka*, *daśā* or, *pārśadas*), this is only because of the abiding sense of loving and reverential servitude the liberated selves feel towards Parabrahman, their lord.⁷⁵⁷

Innumerable freed selves are seated around Lord Puruṣottama, seated on a divine throne in the center of the abode. They all are lost in always gazing devotionally at the beauteous form and figure of Lord Puruṣottama (*sadā pasyanti surayah*).⁷⁵⁸ In Parabrahman’s abode, all the *muktas* are busy beholding the divine personality of Parabrahman and thus are enjoying the ultimate bliss flowing from Him. All *muktas*

⁷⁵⁷ Vac. Gadh. 1/21, Gadh. 1/63, Gadh. 1/64, Amd.6

⁷⁵⁸ Vac. Gadh. 2/13

are *brahmarūpa* (brahmanized) and are engaged in tending Parabrahman devoutly as His servitors.⁷⁵⁹ A freed self has an integrated and all-inclusive perceptual cognition of Parabrahman in the form of ceaseless vision with all His glory and attributes. A freed self's mind and senses - all get fully satiated even in simply looking at His divine personality. It is a unified vision in which, along with eyes, other senses also derive equally fulfilling joy.

The *Taittirīya* and *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣads* say that Parabrahman is of the nature of joy or bliss (*ānanda*).⁷⁶⁰ The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* says that the experience of the infinite alone is joy.⁷⁶¹ This is realized in the state of liberation because the freed self actually experiences it. It is not a passive state of satiation once for all, but a dynamic and ever eager state to have more and more of it. As Akṣaradhāma (the supreme Abode of Parabrahman) is beyond the limitations of three-dimensional space and time, the wonder is that there is no front or back or side, nor far nor near in it. In other words, the Lord Puruṣottama, seated in the center, on the divine-royal-throne (*divya simhāsana*), is seen and experienced by each of the innumerable released selves as the closest in front of him. Each one is directly in frontal face-to-face contact with the full personality of Parabrahman, whether they be present on the sides or back of the Lord from our three-dimensional parameters of *prakṛtika* world.⁷⁶²

According to SSS⁷⁶³, the *muktas* (freed selves), in the divine abode (Brahmapura/Akṣaradhāma), have the only desire to enjoy the '*sukha*' or the bliss of Lord Puruṣottama alone and from Him alone. Besides this, they do not have any thought in their mind. On the other hand, the Lord Puruṣottama also, out of His overflowing grace, love, and compassion, simultaneously and ceaselessly, keeps

⁷⁵⁹ Vac. Gadh. 2/31

⁷⁶⁰ TUSB 2/8

⁷⁶¹ CUSB 7/23/1

⁷⁶² Vac. Loyā. 14

⁷⁶³ SSSK 440

gifting the happiness-bliss in equal measure to all of them. Moreover, the SSS explores:

8. Some Clarity Regarding *Mukti*

8.1 Two Kinds of *Mukti*

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, *mukti* is defined as becoming *akṣararūpa* and offering *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dasbhava*, either on the earth or in Akṣaradhāma. This *mukti* is real in both ways.⁷⁶⁴ In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, two kinds of *mukti* are accepted.⁷⁶⁵

1. *Jīvanmukti*
2. *Videhamukti*

8.2 Is *Jīvanamukti* The First Step for *Videhamukti*?

It is important to clarify here that if a devotee, due to some deficiency during his life, does not experience the state of *jīvanamukti*, in his final moments, his deficiencies can still be removed by the grace of Parabrahman and the *Gunātita Satpuruṣa*. Thus, that devotee is able to attain *videhamukti* and go to Akṣaradhāma.⁷⁶⁶

8.3 The Place Where the *Brāhmika* Body is Attained

A *mukta* who goes to Akṣaradhāma attains a *Brāhmic* form (body) (Vac. Gadh.1/1), has a divine form (Vac. Gadh.1/12), and becomes a *caitanya murti* (Vac. Gadh.1/37, 71). Now the question arises that where and how one achieves the *Brāhmic* body? The answer to this question is- only through the wish of Parabrahman (Sār. 14). The Bhāṣyakāra states: “तत्तनुसंपत्तिश्च परमात्मेच्छामात्राधीनेति तेनैव व्यवस्थाप्यते” (BSSB 4/4/13, link,

⁷⁶⁴ IUSB 8

⁷⁶⁵ BSSB 3/4/51

⁷⁶⁶ Vac. Sār. 11

p.424) “To enrich the *jīva* with the *Brāhmic* body depends on the wish of Parabrahman, only He decides where and how it should be given to the *jīva*.”

8.4 The Service in Akṣaradhāma

The *muktas* who have reached Akṣaradhāma and attained qualities similar to those of Akṣara, forever remain in the service of Parabrahman (Vac. Gadh.1/21). However, in Akṣaradhāma, there is no other service to be performed; the *darśana* of Parabrahman is itself the service. Hence, *muktas* continually enjoy the bliss of the *darśana* of Parabrahman (Vac. Loyā 14, Gadh. 2/13). The BSSB reveals:

“नास्ति तत्र किमपि प्राकृतलोकवदुपभोग्यम्” (BSSB 4/4/10, p.423)

“In Akṣaradhāma, there are no worldly objects for enjoyment.” Then what they actually do in the name of service? The Bhāṣyakāra answers:

ब्राह्मतनुयुक्तः सन् सदैव परमात्मपरमदिव्यसुखं दिव्याऽक्षरधाम्न्यनुभवतीत्यर्थः।” (CUSB 8/12/2, p.387)

“This liberated self, enriched with the divine *Brāhmic* body, continuously experiences the bliss of Parabrahman.”

8.5 Number of *Muktas* and Their Arrangement

In Akṣaradhāma, like Parabrahman, the *Akṣara-muktas* reside with a divine body and divine adornments. As far as the number of *muktas* is concerned, it is infinite. Svāminārāyaṇa expresses: “Countless have become *muktas* , and countless more will become so.”(Vac. Gadh. 1/18, p.56) Moreover, “It is surrounded on all four sides by groups of *muktas*, who are seated facing Him, and who are engrossed in looking at that form of Parabrahman with a fixed gaze. The best way to elaborate upon these aspects is to understand them in the two contexts that the state can be experienced - after death, in Akṣaradhāma, and while alive, on earth.”(Vac. Gadh. 2/13, p.419) Bhadreśadāsa also confirms- सर्वे मुक्ताः समाऽऽकारा⁷⁶⁷ here the plural form of the word indicates that the *muktas* are infinitive in number. Along with it, we should

⁷⁶⁷ SSSK 439

keep it in our mind that the *jīvas* and *īśvaras* maintain their individuality from Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman.⁷⁶⁸ They do not renounce their actual root form.⁷⁶⁹

8.6 Nothing to Achieve More Than That of *Mukti*

Svāminārāyaṇa reveals this *brāhmic state* as one of ethical perfection, personal holiness, freedom from *māyā* (*kāma* and base instincts), absolute fulfillment, and singular devotion to and total engrossment in Parabrahman. They also experience the divine bliss of Parabrahman, yet a master-disciple relationship (Vac. Loyā. 13, Gadh.2/67) is continuously maintained between Parabrahman and the *akṣara-muktas*, as is the relationship of the worshipped and the worshipper (Vac. Gadh.3/37). The Bhāṣyakāra backs the fact while commenting on the *videhamukti* verse of the *Īśopaniṣad* where the liberated self presents itself in front of Parabrahman in Akṣaradhāma.

“तस्य न किञ्चिदपि ज्ञातव्यमवशिष्यते”(IUSB 8, p.18)

“The *mukta* has left nothing to know after attaining Parabrahman.” They indulge in the bliss of Parabrahman as told ‘*Sah brahmanā vipaschita*’⁷⁷⁰ i.e. in the company of omniscient Parabrahman (Parabrahman), the *mukta* gets all his desires (*Kārmās*) fulfilled because the *mukta* has now attained similarity in form and other characteristics. The power, excellence, attributes, divine form, etc., which Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman possess - the same things the liberated selves also acquire in Akṣaradhāma by the grace of Parabrahman. The liberated selves enjoy the same bliss now which Akṣarabrahman enjoys eternally in the company of Parabrahman.

⁷⁶⁸ मुक्तावपि तु मुक्तानां भेदोऽस्त्येव स्वरूपतः। मिथश्चाऽक्षरतश्चैव पुरुषोत्तमतस्तथा ॥ ४४१॥

⁷⁶⁹ Vacanamruta. *Rahashya* 3/67

⁷⁷⁰ TU 2/1/1

8.7 Equality

सर्वे मुक्ताः समाऽऽकारा न्यूनाऽधिकत्ववर्जिताः।

स्त्रीपुरुषत्वशून्याश्च क्षुधादिरहितास्तथा ॥SSSK 439 ॥

“All of these released selves possess the same form in Akṣaradhāma. There is no difference in their relative significance. They are above gender difference and beyond hunger and thirst.” Thus, in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, it is thoroughly accepted that there is no respective difference as far as the *jīva*’s form is concerned. All the *muktas* have identical beatific and beautiful ‘*sat-cit-ānanda*’ form -figure-personality, have similar possession and excellence and have the *sukha* or the enjoyment of the same Lord, and the enjoyment of the same measure of happiness and bliss. Thus, in the abode, there is no ‘*ānanda-tāratamya*,’ i.e. the gradations in the enjoyment of divine bliss among *muktas*, according to *Svāminārāyaṇa*.

8.8 No Nitya Mukta

In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School of philosophy, the concept of *nitya mukta* is strongly refuted. Bhadrēśadāsa explores:

अतो न नित्यमुक्तत्वं नाऽनादिर्ब्रह्मरूपता।

कस्याऽपि लब्धमोक्षस्य जीवस्य वेश्वरस्य वा॥SSSK 432॥

“There is no eternal *brahmabhāva* and permanent *mukta bhāva* either for the *jīva* or *īśvara*.” There are only two eternal entities who are permanent *muktas*, Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman. No one else.

8.9 No Return from Akṣaradhāma

If the power and glory of the released self depend upon the supreme Parabrahman, it being independent or impotent, there is the possibility of the return of the self into *saṃsāra*. Here, the *Sūtrakāra* explains that the self is not subjected to return in anyway. The *Bhāṣyakāra* explains: “एवं भूतस्य मुक्तस्य तादृशापवर्गदशाया अनावृत्तिः नैव प्रत्यावर्तनमिति शब्दात् श्रुतिस्मृतिशब्दादेव लिङ्गादेवागम्यते”(BSSB 4/4/22, p.431) “Through the *Śrutis* and *Smṛtis*,

it is known that there is no return for those released selves who have attained Akṣaradhāma.”⁷⁷¹ So there is no return from the abode of Parabrahman, and no rebirth as well after attaining Akṣaradhāma.⁷⁷²

8.10 Power of Attorney

The released self attains so much power from Parabrahman except in the matter of cosmic activities. The cosmic activity consists of control over the difference of the essential natures, existence, and activity of all sentient and non-sentient things. BSSB itself defines:

जगद्व्यापारवर्जं प्रकरणादसंनिहितत्वाच्च॥ BS 4/4/17॥

जगद्व्यापारवर्जं जगत्सम्बन्धी यो व्यापारस्तदुत्पत्तिस्थितिनियमनाऽवसानादिरूपस्तद्वर्जमेवाऽक्षराधिपत्यनुग्रहलब्धमुक्तैश्वर्यं भवितुमर्हम्। सकलजगदुत्पत्तिनियमनादिव्यापारस्तु स्वातन्त्र्येण परब्रह्मणस्तन्मित्येच्छयाऽक्षरब्रह्मणश्चेत्युभयोरेव। (BSSB 4/4/17 p.428) Although the *mukta* has power and some qualities of ‘*apahtpāpmadi*’ as mentioned in the scriptures, only Parabrahman and by his wish Akṣarabrahman are mentioned in the scriptures as the cosmic cause, sustentation, and destruction. The released selves are not at all mentioned, and hence, cosmic activity does not belong to the liberated self. Thus Brahman and Parabrahman are independently responsible for the activities regarding the cosmos.

8.11 No Deficiency in Akṣaradhāma

The seekers of salvation, during their worldly existence in the embodied state, maybe men or women, high born or low born, blind or lame, deaf or dumb, old or young, handsome or ugly, leper or leucodermic; but when they become *ekāntik* and acquire brahmanhood, they attain emancipation and as *muktas* in the abode of Parabrahman, they all attain identical divine form-figure devoid of any earthly (human) defect-deformity in them.⁷⁷³ The *vikārah* or deficiencies in the form of six-

⁷⁷¹ यामवाप्य पुनर्नैव मायाबन्धनसम्भवः ।

जीवतो दिव्यदेशे वा स्थितस्य चेतनाऽऽत्मनः ॥ SSSK - ४३४॥

⁷⁷² BG 15/6, 8/21, CU 8/15/1

⁷⁷³ Vac. Loya 18

fold human infirmities (*oromia*) such as distress (*ṣoka*), delusion (*moha*), old age (*jarā*), death (*mṛtyu*), hunger (*kṣudhā*) and thirst (*pipāsā*) no more exist in the state of liberation (*mokṣa*). There is no sleep and fatigue, aging and disease, or any other ephemeral defect in the state of *mokṣa*.⁷⁷⁴ All *muktas* are attuned to Parabrahman. The *muktas* are lost in Parabrahman. All are in a state of divine ecstasy or euphoria, enjoying the bliss of Parabrahman forever.⁷⁷⁵

There is no aging, no disease, no death, no return into *saṃsāra* (the cycles of birth and death), no disappointment, no frustration, no consequent pain-suffering, nor any defect or deficiency in the state of *mokṣa*. Every *mukta* is attuned and absorbed in enjoying the nectarine-mellow of unalloyed bliss of Parabrahman's beautiful personality. Every *mukta* cherishes joy, bliss, and transparent devotion to Parabrahman in equal measure with all others. There is no envy, strife, or competition in the state of *mokṣa*.

8.12 The Concept of *Dāsatva*

The goal of the devotee is not to become sugar itself but to taste it. His goal is not to become Parabrahman Himself, but to enjoy the bliss of His company and communion. So there is no ‘*Svarūpa ekya*’ or any other relation between Parabrahman and the *mukta* than the *svāmī -sevaka* or *upasya-upasaka* relation. “अतो मुक्तावपि सेव्यसेवकभावो नोच्छिद्यते इति रहस्यं विज्ञापयितुकाम इह सूत्रकारः.”(BSSB 3/3/25, p.331) “Thus, even in the state of *mukti*, the relation of *sevyā sevaka* never subsides. This is all about explained by the author of the *Brahmasūtra*.”

⁷⁷⁴ BSSB 4/4/19, pp.429-430

⁷⁷⁵ BSSB 4/4/20, p.430

8.13 Persistence of Atomic Nature of *Jīva*

Śrutis and *Smṛtis* clearly proclaim that the *jivātman* is extremely subtle and is atomic in size.⁷⁷⁶ Also, in the state of liberation, the *jivātman* retains its subtle atomic nature. This atomic nature of *jīva* does not change, nor does it transform into a new bodily shape.⁷⁷⁷ In the state of emancipation (*mukti*), *jīva*'s atomic nature continues, but its knowledge/consciousness (*dharmabhutajnāna*) becomes fully expanded and all-pervading, and thus acquires omniscience. It is this *aṇutva* (atomic nature), that remains as the distinguishing characteristic in the state of liberation; and consequently, the excellence and effulgence of Parabrahman continue to remain far more superior to the *mukta-jīvas* (released selves).⁷⁷⁸

8.14 Attainment of Akṣaradhāma and Other Realms

The BG explains the vast difference between both:

आब्रह्मभुवनाल्लोकाः पुनरावर्तिनोऽर्जुन ।

मामुपेत्य तु कौन्तेय पुनर्जन्म न विद्यते ॥BG 8/16॥

“The dwellers of all the worlds, below the world of *Brahmā*, are subject to the miseries of repeated birth and death. But, after attaining Me, O Arjuna, one does not take birth again.” Thus, in the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, only *brahmarūpa* devotees can attain the ultimate liberation. Otherwise, through only conducting charities or the *sāttvika kārmas*, one can attain Swarga Loka (heaven). After enjoying heavenly sense pleasures, they return to this mortal world upon the end of their good *kārma* (or *punya*). In this manner, Bhadreśadāsa explains, the performers of Vedic rituals take repeated birth and death without being *brahmarūpa*.⁷⁷⁹ Moreover, the Worshippers of the *devas* go to the *devas*, the worshippers of the ancestors go to the ancestors, and the worshippers of the ghosts go to the ghosts,

⁷⁷⁶ MU 3/1/9

⁷⁷⁷ Vac. Kar. 1, Gadh. 2/66

⁷⁷⁸ BSSB 2/3/23, CUSB 3/14/2-3, BUSB 4/3/7

⁷⁷⁹ BGSB 9/21, p.214, MUSB 1/2/10, p.252

but my devotees, who offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman come to me and are not born again.⁷⁸⁰ And those who have committed only sins in their lives will be subjected to infernal realms.⁷⁸¹

9. Conclusion

The history of human existence is a history of endless efforts to eradicate sorrow and attain happiness. But due to our *kārma*-bondage misery remains forever. Then what should we do to uproot this bondage and acquire the ultimate bliss? Perhaps this was the only search and research of the great thinkers. Death alone is not the full-stop to our sufferings. There is an infinitive stream of lives; it would mean a tragic blow to the sense of human adventure, freedom, and effort. We cannot be satisfied with less than immortality. More than that, immortality must be accompanied by joy. This state indeed is liberation or *moksha*. In this way, the fifth chapter of this thesis discusses liberation, the ultimate fruit of spiritual endeavor. In the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School, liberation is defined as a state in which one is *brahmarūpa* and offers *bhakti* to Paramātmān. The *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Svāminārāyaṇa* Bhāṣyas further explain two types of liberation, or *mukti* - *jīvanmukti* and *videhamukti*. *Jīvanmukti* is spiritual perfection that is reached while one is still living. The state a released self experiences after death is known as *videhamukti*.

This chapter provides an efficient analysis of *jīvanamukti* and *videhamukti* at length, describing the process by which one becomes a *videhamukta* and the benefits that the *videhamukta* enjoys. Specifically, after the death of the physical body, There, the self receives a new body, attains divine virtues like those of Brahman and Paramātmā, and enjoys eternal bliss. Upon *videhamukti*, the self does not return to

⁷⁸⁰ BGSB 9/25, p.216

⁷⁸¹ BSSB 3/1/12, link, p.275

saṃsāra. All of them (*muktas*) enjoy the same enjoyment (i.e. the same *darśana*) and the same bliss of Parabrahman.

CHAPTER -6

CONCLUSION

1. Study of the Vedanta Darśana

Vedanta (*Veda* + *anta*) means the ending part of the Vedas. It is a specific reference to the *Upaniṣads* and the philosophy they contain. Vedanta is one of the six *Darśanas* or philosophies of Hinduism. It is also known as *Uttara Mīmāṃsā* or *Brahma Mīmāṃsā*. The first systematic study of philosophy seems to have been done by Bādarāyaṇa in the *Brahmasūtras*. The school derives its philosophy mainly from the Vedas in general as well as the *Upaniṣads*, *Brahmasūtras* (also known as *Vedantasūtras*), and *BhagavadGītā*. They are the foundational texts of the school of Vedanta and are collectively identified as the *Prasthānatrayī*.

The principal concepts of Vedanta include the nature of reality, the forms of Parabrahman, Brahman, *māyā*, *īśvara*, and *ātman* or *jīva* and their relationship. Moreover, it encompasses the cause of creation, nature of bondage, means of liberation, states of consciousness, self-purification, transmigration of *ātman*, and the practice of *yoga* and meditation. We analytically studied all these topics here on the basis of the *Prasthānatrayī Svāmīnārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas* and the *Vacanāmṛta*.

2. New Era of Darśana Tradition

Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa's *Siddhānta* (doctrinal philosophy) is the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana* or Akṣarapuruṣottama Vedanta or *Svāmīnārāyaṇa Darshan*. Through its revelation, Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa provided a unique, unprecedented contribution to Vedic knowledge. Whatever he taught in his time is still available in the form of the *Vacanāmṛta*, a prominent scripture of the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* faith. His successors, Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmi, Brahmasvarūpa Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī Mahārāja and Yogījī Mahārāja

continued this legacy. Continuing the philosophical work of his ancestors Gurus Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmi Mahārāja spread Svāmīnārāyaṇa's teaching throughout the world. Through his wish and blessings, Mahāmahopādhyāya Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa authored commentaries (*bhāṣyas*) on the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtra*.

3. The Theme of the Thesis

Two centuries later, commentaries (henceforth *bhāṣya*) in the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* School were written and unequivocally acclaimed. The author of the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa claims that this *bhāṣya*, on the *Prasthānatrayī*, represents the eternal Vedic ideology proclaimed by Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa. Essentially, Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa has evidently elucidated all his fundamental philosophical principles in his *Vacanāmṛta*. The *Vacanāmṛta* is the most authentic scripture of the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* faith. It is a historical monument that was compiled in the physical presence of Svāmīnārāyaṇa.

When we talk about the principles, which were given by Svāmīnārāyaṇa two hundred years ago, are authored today into the scholastic way on the base of *Prasthānatrayī*, it provokes many issues regarding the authenticity of the teaching of Svāmīnārāyaṇa and the principles shaped by the Bhāṣyakāra according to the *Prasthānatrayī*. The period of two hundred years is enough to change the phenomenon of social, religious, and moral aspects of any particular region. Consequently, these changes can also be perceived in the various other writings, which stand at two different and vast time zone.

This thesis comparatively analyzes the principles between the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāmīnārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam* of Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa to determine to what proportion the *Bhāṣyam* accords with the principles of Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa encoded in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Therefore, by critically analyzing

Sādhū Bhadrēśādāsa's commentaries in light of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta*, this thesis intends to bring forth a valid finding as below. We will now review the central principles of the Akṣarapuruṣottama *Darśana* that have been covered within this book.

4. The Essence of the Thesis

Before we move to provide an analysis of all the chapters, let us present the essence of both the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta*. Collectively we use the term 'Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana' for them:

- The Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana* or Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is distinct and independent from *Advait*, *Vishishtādvait*, *Dvait*, *Shuddhādvait* and all other *darśanas*.
- The Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is the name of the philosophical doctrine established by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa.
- The Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is the essence of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings; it is the essence of the *Vacanāmṛta*.
- Epistemologically, the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana accepts all *pramāṇas* which are helpful to know Akṣarapuruṣottama. Akṣarapuruṣottama are the ultimate knowers, by their grace, all type of knowledge is imbibed by *jīvas* and *īśvaras*.
- Metaphysically, this *darśana* asserts the eternal distinction between the following five ontological entities: Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *māyā*, *īśvara*, and *jīva*.
- Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman transcend *māyā*, whereas *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are in the clutch of *māyā*.
- Akṣarabrahman serves through the following four forms: (1) *chidākāśh*, (2) the divine abode of Puruottama, (3) the personal form forever in the service of Puruṣottama within Akṣaradhāma and (4) the present manifest Guru.

- Puruṣottama Parabrahman is supreme, the all-doer, forever with a form, eternally divine, forever manifest through the Akṣarabrahman Guru, and possesses infinite virtues.
- The Svāmīnārāyaṇa Darśana is the *brahmavidyā* of the *Upaniṣads*, the *adhyātmavidyā* of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *brahmagnān* of the *Brahmasūtra*.
- The essential message of this *darśana* is to become *brahmarūpa* and offer *upāsanā* and *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dāsbhāva*.
- The essence of *sāadhanā* is to please Bhagavān by becoming *akṣararupa* (*brahmarūpa*) and offering *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dāsbhāva*. This *bhakti* is accompanied by attributes such as *dharma*, *jñāna*, and *vairāgya* to Puruṣottama with *dāsbhāva*.
- Within the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* word, the term Svāmī refers to Akṣara and the term ‘Nārāyaṇa’ refers to Puruṣottama Parabrahman. The terms ‘Svāmīnārāyaṇa’ and ‘Akṣara-Puruṣottama’ are synonymous.
- According to the teachings of Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa himself, the terms Svāmī and ‘Akṣara’ found within “Svāmīnārāyaṇa” and ‘Akṣara-Puruṣottama’ refer to Guṇātītānanda Svāmī, whereas the terms ‘Nārāyaṇa’ and ‘Puruṣottama’ refer to himself, Sahajānanda Śrīhari.
- One thoroughly realizes the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Siddhānta* and attains ultimate *mukti* (liberation) through the firm association with the *Akṣarabrahmasvarupa* Guru.
- The Svāmīnārāyaṇa Darśana accepts two types of *mukti*
 1. *Jīvanamukti* and 2. *Videhamukti*.
- The Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana* continues as a thriving and living *darshan* today through the creation of thousands of *mandirs* and the continuous practice of its traditions, which include wearing a *kaṇṭhi*, performing daily *pujā*, and offering daily prayers. Today, under the leadership of Pragaṭa

Brahmasvarūp Maṃhata Svāmī Mahārāja, hundreds of thousands of devotees continue to strengthen their conviction in the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana*.

5. Analysis of Chapters

5.1 Chapter 1

This is an introductory chapter, which provides the foundation to understand the philosophical principles found in the Svāminārāyaṇa *Darśana*.

SN	TOPIC	ENUNCIATION	FINDINGS
1.	Vedic <i>Darśana</i> Tradition	1. <i>Sāṃkhya Darśana</i> 2. <i>Yoga Darśana</i> 3. <i>Nyāya Darśana</i> 4. <i>Vaiśeṣika Darśana</i> 5. <i>Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana</i> 6. <i>Vedānta Darśana</i>	<i>Darśana</i> is a sincere, mature, and diligent spiritual reflection aimed at attaining the ultimate truth. Over time, this contemplation resulted in the gradual emergence of various streams of philosophical thought within India.
2.	Vedānta <i>Darśana</i>	1. <i>Advaitā Darśana</i> (Ādi Śaṃkara) 2. <i>Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana</i> (Rāmānuja) 3. <i>Dvaita Darśana</i> (Madhvācārya) 4. <i>Dvaitādvaita Darśana</i> (Nimbārka) 5. <i>Śuddha Advaitā Darśana</i> (Vallabhā)	The <i>Upaniṣads</i> are known as Vedānta. Therefore, the school of philosophy that is based on the <i>Upaniṣads</i> is the Vedānta <i>Darśana</i> . The essence of the <i>Upaniṣads</i> is <i>brahmavidyā</i> .

		6. <i>Acintyabhedābheda Darśana</i> (Caitanya Mahāprabhu)	
3.	<i>The Prasthānatrayī</i>	1. <i>The Upaniṣads</i> 2. <i>Śrīmad Bhagavata Gītā</i> 3. <i>The Brahmasūtras</i>	<i>Prasthān</i> means a <i>śāstra</i> that establishes principles, and the suffix <i>trayī</i> indicates a quantity of three. The three <i>śāstras</i> which comprise the <i>Prasthānatrayī</i> are the <i>Upaniṣads</i> , <i>Śrīmad Bhagavata Gītā</i> , and <i>Brahmasūtras</i> . These <i>śāstras</i> are named <i>prasthān</i> because it is only through them that philosophical principles are established (<i>prasthāpan</i>).
4.	The Svāminārāyaṇa Tradition	1. Life and Work of <i>Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa</i> 2. Philosophy 3. <i>The Vacanāmṛta</i> 4. <i>The Guruparamparā</i>	Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa provided a unique, unprecedented contribution to Vedic knowledge. Whatever he taught in his time is still available in the form of the <i>Vacanāmṛta</i> , a prominent scripture of the Svāminārāyaṇa faith. His successors, Akṣarabrahman

			Guṇātītānanda Svāmi, Brahmasvarūpa Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī Mahārāja, Yogījī Mahārāja, Pramukha Svāmi Mahārāja and Mahanta Svāmi Mahārāja continued this legacy.
5.	The <i>Prasthānatrayī- Svāmīnarayan- Bhāṣya</i>	1. The commentator 2. Characteristics of the commentary 3. <i>The Svāmīnarayan-Siddhānta-Sudhā</i>	Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa has vested meticulous effort in authoring the commentaries on the <i>Prasthānatrayī</i> and has succeeded in advancing the field of Vedanta philosophy.

5.2 Chapter - 2

5.2.1 Analysis on the Basis of Epistemology

In Indian philosophies, *pramāṇa* is the means which can lead to knowledge and serve as one of the core concepts in the Indian epistemological system. The focus of *pramāṇa* is how correct knowledge can be acquired, how one knows, how one doesn't, and to what extent knowledge pertinent about someone or something can be acquired. Here, we present a brief analytical study of the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāmīnārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of epistemology.

This chapter focuses on the Indian *Pramāṇa* tradition, which is concerned with the means and criteria of valid empirical knowledge and correct cognition. Although all the famous and traditionally accepted *pramāṇas* in the Indian philosophical

systems are analyzed here on the basis of the *Vacanāmṛta* and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas, such as perception, inference, verbal testimony, analogy, etc. this chapter aims to decipher some unique stars in the sky of epistemology. In this manner, as far as the number of *pramāṇas* is concerned, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition harbors different attitudes. For example, the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya clearly mentions the significance of *pramāṇa* (BSSB-1/1/1, 1/1/3; KeUSB-1/3; BUSB-2/4/5). However, like Svāminārāyaṇa, the Bhāṣyakāra is not bound with the fixed numbers of *pramāṇa*. He averred- “ब्रह्मब्रह्मपरौ प्रमाणशतकैर्मायाऽधिपौ कीर्तितौ” (SSS- *Maṅgalam* – *abhyarthanā*-1).

Along with this, the *prāṇāyāma* of *pramāṇa* also depends on Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman along with the Guru. They are indeed determinant and cause of all *pramāṇa* and *pramā* (knowledge). They are the cause of intellect that obtains knowledge and provides knowledge to a seeker and is knowable. Their grace is indispensable to attain true knowledge. The discussion between logic, *śāstra*, and the Guru also provides a special feature to this chapter. At the end of this chapter, *khyātivāda* of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School is presented as well.

S.No	PRINCIPLES	THE <i>VACANĀMṚTA</i>	THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA
1.	<i>Meyadhīnā mānasiddhiḥ</i>	Parabrahman knows everything about the past, the present, and the future. He doesn't need any means. Means are meant for <i>māyic</i> .	Parabrahman doesn't need the <i>indriyas</i> or sense organs for attaining knowledge since his knowledge is self-proven.

2.	Acceptance of <i>Pramāṇas</i>	Not fixed numbers. In fact, ultimate knowledge is important. Every means of knowledge is important which leads us to the knowledge of Brahma-Parabrahman.	Hundreds of means are welcomed if they are worthy to attain knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.
3.	Ultimate source of knowledge	By the grace Brahma-Parabrahman, his <i>indriya</i> and <i>antaḥkaraṇa</i> become divine. Then only he attains the ultimate knowledge.	Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman along with the Guru, are determinant and the cause of all <i>pramāṇa</i> and <i>pramās</i> (knowledge).
4.	<i>Pramāṇa</i> of Parabrahman in human form	Knowing Parabrahman perfectly means knowing the manifest form of Parabrahman.	Due to Parabrahman's resolution that He incarnates on earth and the seeker becomes able to obtain his true knowledge.
5.	Perception	Parabrahman then divinizes his cognitive and conative senses. So, a devotee gets correct knowledge of Parabrahman and the world.	The <i>Bhāṣyakara</i> says about Parabrahman- behold all the entire creation, animate, inanimate, and whatever else you would like to see – all at

			one place in My (Parabrahman's) body.
6.	Inference	Svāminārāyaṇa was a protagonist both of intellect and intuition but rejected logic as an ultimate means.	He used a superb variety of logic yet asserted that the highest knowledge is beyond suppositional reasoning.
7.	Verbal Testimony	The scriptural testimony is regarded as the best guide for the knowledge of Brahma-Parabrahman.	Scripture-verbal testimony is the most reliable source (<i>pramāṇa</i>) among all the epistemological means.
8.	Guru	The <i>satpuruṣa</i> (Akṣara-Guru) is the scriptures personified, and hence, he alone can unveil the meanings and implied sense of the scriptural words.	Akṣara-Guru is highly extolled both for understating the correct meaning and implications of the scriptures.
9.	Analogy	Used to understand mystical and profound spiritual philosophy.	Helps as a base for a seeker to fulfill his spiritual understanding.
10.	<i>Pramā</i>	Knowledge is understood as definite, doubt-free, truthful, awareness of the thing, episode or concept,	Knowledge, which is characterized by the knowledge of the five entities: <i>jīva</i> , <i>īśvara</i> ,

		especially about the true nature of five ontological realities.	<i>māyā</i> , <i>Brahma</i> , and Parabrahman, as they truly are.
11.	Process of attaining knowledge	When the <i>vr̥tti</i> of the <i>indriyas</i> enter the object, the mind and <i>jīva</i> also go along with the <i>vr̥tti</i> ; then, the object is seen and fully recognized.	Firstly, the <i>indriyas</i> connect with the object, then with the mind resulting in knowledge.
12.	<i>Khyāti</i>	Accepts the erroneous knowledge and worldly things as being real.	We accept <i>cid-acid khyāti</i> in erroneous knowledge.

5.3 Chapter - 3

5.3.1 Analysis on the Basis of Metaphysics

In this chapter, the metaphysics of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School is analyzed based on the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas*. Metaphysics is related to the study of the eternal ontological entity or entities in a particular belief system.⁷⁸² *Svāminārāyaṇa* reveals straightforwardly, “From all the Vedas, *Purāṇas*, *Itihāsa* and *Smṛti* scriptures, I have engendered the principle that *jīva*, *māyā*, *īśvara*, Brahman and Parameśvara are all eternal.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/10) *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* confirms, “जीवेश्वरमायाब्रह्मरूपमुक्तादिसर्वेभ्यः परभूताद् ... अक्षरात्.... परभूतः ...परमात्मा ।”⁷⁸³

In the history of world philosophy, this is indeed a matchless principle of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. It has been analyzed as a critical factor in this chapter, which provides elucidation on each entity with its nature, form, and function.

⁷⁸² Brahmadarśandāsa Sādhu, *Vacanāmṛta Rahasya*, op.cit., p.2

⁷⁸³ Sādhu Bhadrēśadāsa, *Mundaka Upaniṣad* 2/1/2,

Moreover, the chapter defines a clear distinction and relation among these ontological entities. The creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the cosmos are discussed, and Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman elaborated as its cause with critical argumentations. In addition to this, a deep narration of Akṣarabrahman as transcending *māyā* is the most novel contribution to this chapter. We present a brief analytical study of the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* and the *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of metaphysics.

S.N.	PRINCIPLES	THE VACANĀMṚTA	THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA
*	Five eternal ontological entities	Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān, Akṣarabrahman, <i>māyā</i> , <i>īśvara</i> , and <i>jīva</i> - these five entities are eternal	<i>Jīva</i> , <i>māyā</i> , <i>īśvara</i> , Brahman and Parameśvara are all eternal.
1.	<i>Jīva</i>	The <i>jīva</i> has three bodies: <i>sthūla deha</i> , <i>sūkṣma deha</i> , and <i>kāraṇa deha</i> .	The <i>atman</i> which resides in the body is affected by its three bodies: <i>sthūla deha</i> , <i>sūkṣma deha</i> , and <i>kāraṇa deha</i> , and also with three states of it: <i>jāgrata avasthā</i> , <i>svapna avasthā</i> , and <i>susupti avasthā</i> .
2.	<i>Īśvara</i>	It is known as <i>īśvara</i> due to its significant powers. That Virāṭa Puruṣa is just like this <i>Jīva</i> , and his actions are	<i>Devas</i> fall in the <i>īśvara</i> category.” In addition, Parabrahman creates realms therefore they can

		also similar to that of the <i>jīva</i> .”	enjoy the fruits of their <i>karmas</i> .” Like the <i>jīva</i> the <i>īśvaras</i> also have three bodies. They are involved in the creation of the world.
3.	MĀYĀ	<i>Prakṛti</i> is characterized by the three <i>guṇas</i> , and by both insentience and sentiency. It is eternal, indistinct, the field of all beings and all elements, including <i>mahattattva</i> , and God’s divine power.	<i>Māyā</i> ’s three <i>guṇas</i> ; <i>sāttvika</i> , <i>rājasika</i> , and <i>tāmasikaguṇa</i> , are experienced by all.
4.	Akṣarabrahman	Puruṣottama is greater even than Akṣara, who is greater than all else. Moreover, God - who is Puruṣottama - forever remains present in Akṣaradhāma.	Parabrahman is greater even than Akṣara, the greatest. Parabrahman is entirely present and graciously active through the Akṣara - <i>brahmasvarūpa</i> Guru.
5.	Parabrahman	Thus, the governor of all activities and the lord of all is one Parabrahman. Therefore, God is definitely one, and no one can become like him.	It is not possible that there would be more than one God. Infinite miraculous deeds happen through only one ontologically supreme entity Parabrahman.

5.4 Chapter – 4

5.4.1 Analysis on the Basis of Spiritual Endeavour

This chapter deals with the spiritual endeavor or *sāadhanā* a seeker has to perform in order to attain the ultimate reality. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and his *gunātīta sādhus* have lived and taught a unique and practical path of spiritual *sāadhanā* that leads to the realization of *ātman*, Brahman, and Paramātmā. We made this *sāadhanā* as our subject matter and analyzed it through the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya in light of the *Vacanāmṛta*. The primary tool described here is a distinction and significance of self-effort and God's grace. The chapter explicitly corroborated it. Then we moved to enunciate the most fundamental factor of the *Svāminārāyaṇa sāadhanā*, *Brahmabhāva*, which includes every spiritual *sāadhanā*. To become *brahmarūpa* and offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman is the prominent *sāadhanā* of the tradition. Further, we have described *ekāntika dharma* and its components (*dharm*, *jñāna*, *vairāgya*, and *bhakti*). Refuge (*āśraya*), *dīkṣā*, *niyama*, general *sāadhanā*, and atonement were the central points of discussion in this chapter.

Our *sāadhanā* chapter provides a detailed description of the importance of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru by which all aspirants can succeed in their spiritual quest and experience the ultimate bliss of God. We, now, present a brief analytical study of the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of spiritual endeavor.

SN	PRINCIPLES	THE VACANĀMṚTA	THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA
1.	Grace and Self-Effort	Hence, personal endeavor itself is the	Guru and God's grace is important to apply all other

		greatest of all spiritual endeavors for attaining liberation. One who has such virtues, can attain God's grace.	spiritual endeavors. By their will, an aspirant can achieve everything.
2.	<i>Brahmavidyā</i>	With such understanding of BP, one should develop oneness between one's <i>jivātman</i> and that Brahman and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with Him. With such understanding, <i>brahmajñāna</i> also becomes an unobstructed path to attaining the highest state of enlightenment.	By which Akṣara and Puruṣottama are truly known is called <i>brahmavidyā</i> . By identifying <i>brahmavidyā</i> as the means towards realizing these two ontologically distinct entities, the Akṣarapuruṣottama Doctrine is understood as an expression of <i>brahmavidyā</i> .
3.	Oneness with the Brahman	The <i>jīva</i> realizes, 'My self is Brahman, which transcends and is free from <i>māyā</i> .' If one associates with Brahman through continuous contemplation in this manner, the <i>jīva</i>	<i>Ātmagrihīti</i> , which is known as the firm oneness with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, is the most prominent spiritual endeavor of all spiritual endeavors to complete <i>upāsanā</i> towards God.

		acquires the virtues of Brahman.	
4.	The Role of the Guru	For a person who desires his own liberation, nothing in this world is more blissful than God and the Guru. Therefore, just as a person has <i>ātmabuddhi</i> towards their own body, they should similarly have <i>ātmabuddhi</i> with God and His <i>santa</i> .	All actions, thoughts and intentions of the aspirant are now imbued with a spiritual awareness of the Guru and thus take on a wholly devotional character and spirit. This frees the aspirant of his/ her <i>karmika</i> bondage.
5.	<i>Śaraṇāgati</i> (refuge)	Accepting the firm refuge of God is the single, greatest endeavor amongst all spiritual endeavors for pleasing God.	complete relinquish all <i>dharma</i> s (i.e, duties as conceived by you) and seeking God alone as unfaltering refuge. He shall assuredly release you from all sins.
6.	<i>Upāsanā</i>	All greatness is achieved through the force of the <i>upāsanā</i> of God. Without <i>upāsanā</i> , though, nothing can be accomplished	<i>Upāsanā</i> is a type of devotion. In this devotion, there is constant remembrance of God. That is the root of all endeavors.

7.	<i>Bhakti</i> (Devotion- Worship)	<i>Bhakti</i> , an intense love for God which is devoid of all desires for fruits, and which is accompanied with an understanding of God's greatness.	Intense and singular love towards God coupled with the glory of Him is called <i>bhakti</i> in the scriptures.
9.	<i>Sāadhanā</i> for Daily Life	God is pleased the most by <i>satsaṅga</i> . It alone puts an end to all worldly ties and attachments.	In this way, the <i>mantra</i> shows that through the <i>Satsaṅga</i> of the <i>Brahmasvarūpa</i> Guru, <i>adhyātma vidyā</i> becomes fruitful in true sense.

5.5 Chapter – 5

5.5.1 Analysis on the Basis of Soteriology

Soteriology is the study of the divine accomplishment of the salvation⁷⁸⁴ of humanity. In Indian philosophy, soteriology can be defined as attaining *mokṣa*. This chapter explains the fruit, the ultimate goal of the spiritual endeavors performed by a seeker. Within the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana*, devotees have a relationship with Akṣara and Puruṣottama in the *sāadhanadaśā* and also after attaining *mukti*. *Mukti* is defined as becoming *Akṣararūpa* and offering *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dāsabhāva*. Thus, even in the state of *mukti*, one, upon becoming *brahmarūpa*, continuously offers *upāsanā* to Puruṣottama with *dāsabhāva*.

⁷⁸⁴ Definition of salvation: Oxford, 2nd ed. 1989: "The saving of the soul; the deliverance from sin and its consequences"

Considering it in the background, the chapter discusses the nature of bondage and liberation. *Jīvanmukti* and *videhamukti* have been elucidated. Moreover, by the oneness with Brahman, one does not become Brahman or Parabrahman after becoming a *jīvanmukta* or *videhmukta*. This topic is corroborated with a large series of arguments. The way to the abode (*Arcirādi mārga*), the state of *mukti* in the abode, *brāhmī tanu* (body of a *mukta*), the relation between God and a *mukta* is discussed at length in this chapter. This chapter provides an efficient analysis of those prominent principles regarding soteriology described in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta*.

S.N	PRINCIPLES	THE <i>VACANĀMṚTA</i>	THE <i>SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA</i>
1.	<i>Mukti</i>	Only when one constantly associates with Brahman, through contemplation - as previously described - is that attachment broken.	By acquiring this <i>brāhmīsthiti</i> (<i>brahmabhāva</i>) one attains liberation and experiences God's bliss.
2.	Bondage	This <i>māyā</i> of the <i>jīva</i> , i.e., the <i>kāraṇa</i> body, is attached so firmly to the <i>jīva</i> that they cannot be separated by any means whatsoever.	Therefore, true knowledge is hidden due to ignorance in the form of a causal body of <i>māyā</i> .
3.	What is Oneness?	<i>Jīva</i> never becomes Brahman or Parabrahman in any state. The oneness with AB is qualitative oneness only.	This means that the worshipper of the Brahman gains the qualities of Brahman. They do not, however, become

			ontologically one with the worshipped Brahman.
4.	Jīvanamukti	When the devotee has kept their mind at the holy feet of God in this manner, they do not have to die to attain the abode of God - they have attained it while still alive.	When all desires clinging to the heart of one perish, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains Brahman. The <i>Śruti</i> itself establishes the principle of <i>jīvanamukti</i> .
5.	Videhamukti	We also wish to join the ranks of the <i>Akṣararūpa muktas</i> and go to Akṣaradhāma to forever remain in the service of God with a <i>brahmi tanu</i> .	The <i>brahmarūpa</i> devotee continuously offers <i>upāsana</i> to God till their death. After their death, he enters the abode of God and gets the divine <i>Brāhmika</i> body by the wish and grace of Him.
6.	<i>Arcirādi Marg</i>	After such an <i>ekāntik bhakta</i> leaves their body and becomes free of all influences of <i>māyā</i> , they attain Akṣaradhāma via <i>Arcirādi marg</i> .	<i>Devayana</i> or <i>arcirādi mārga</i> is the actual way through which the liberated <i>ātman</i> goes to the abode of God.
7.	<i>Upasya-Upasaka Relationship</i>	This devotional relationship between Parabrahman and the liberated <i>ātman</i> s is thus	Despite being similar in appearance to God, <i>muktas</i> are the servant devotees of Parabrahman.

		referred to as the ‘ <i>svāmi-sevaka sambandha</i> ’.	
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6. Ultimate Conclusion

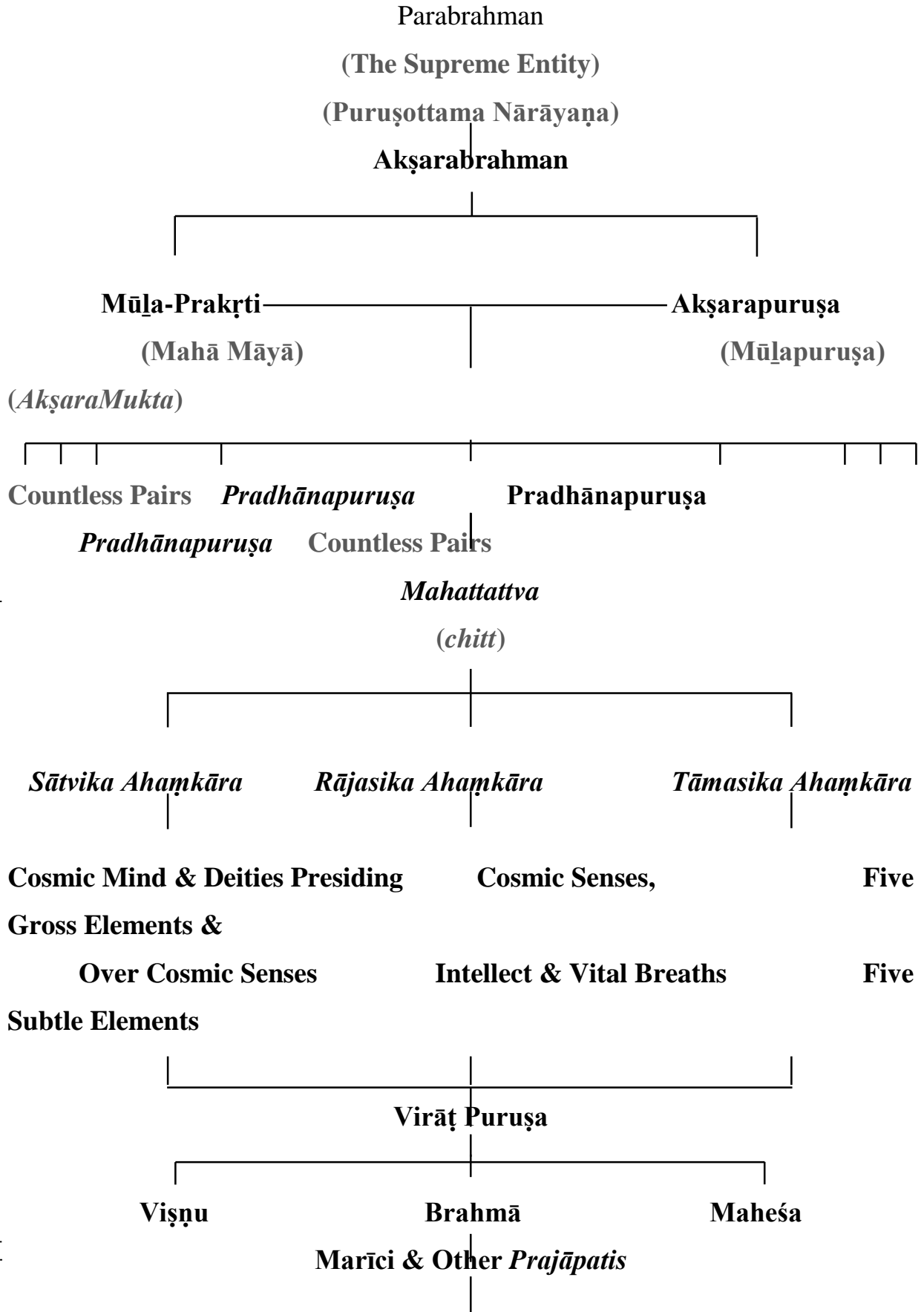
The prominent aim of this study was to analyze the principles narrated in the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* in the light of Svāminārāyaṇa’s *Vacanāmṛta*, since the *Vacanāmṛta* is a principal sacred text of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya* (religious tradition) delivered by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa himself. After two hundred years of Svāminārāyaṇa’s time, the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam* were authored by Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa. So far, after providing the first introductory chapter, we have analyzed and assessed the main doctrinal interpretations provided within the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* and the *Vacanāmṛta* according to these four main factors: epistemology, metaphysics, spiritual endeavors, and soteriology.

The current study accumulated several factors where both scriptures propagate the same idea. After analyzing a number of examples, the findings clearly suggest that the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* thoroughly follows the *Vacanāmṛta*’s principles. We can conclude by saying that Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa has put the philosophical principle of Svāminārāyaṇa found in the *Vacanāmṛta*, in a scholastic way. In this way, after following the proper vedāntika process and analysis, we find that the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas follow the principles of the *Vacanāmṛta*. In other words, in both scriptures, the principles are the same. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis, which echoed earlier that there is no relation between these two scriptures.

Moreover, readers will be glad to know that for the first time in the history of the Indian philosophy, the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyas* were analyzed on the foundation, the *Vacanāmṛta*, on which the entire *saṃpradāya* is standing. The

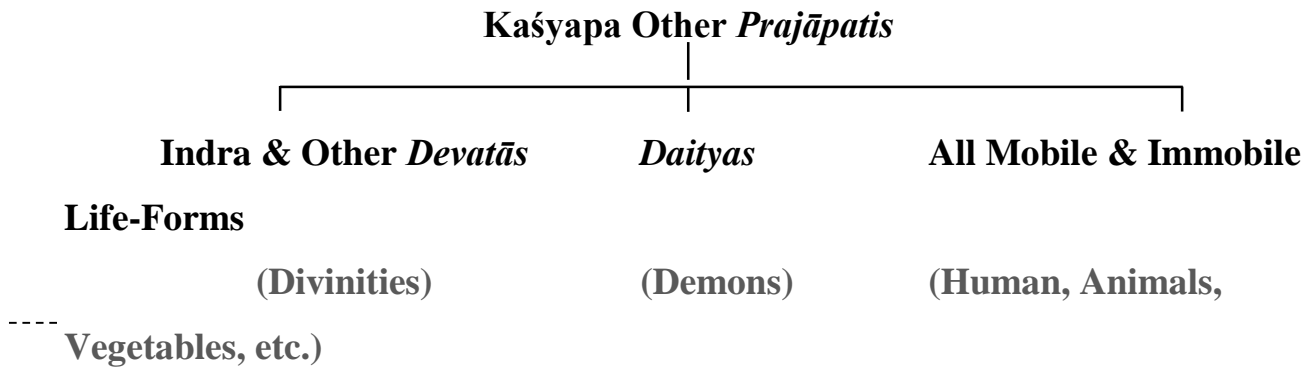
findings of this study have many important implications for those who intend to conduct research on the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Darśana*.

THE PROCTOLOGICAL PROCESS [UTPATTI SARGA]

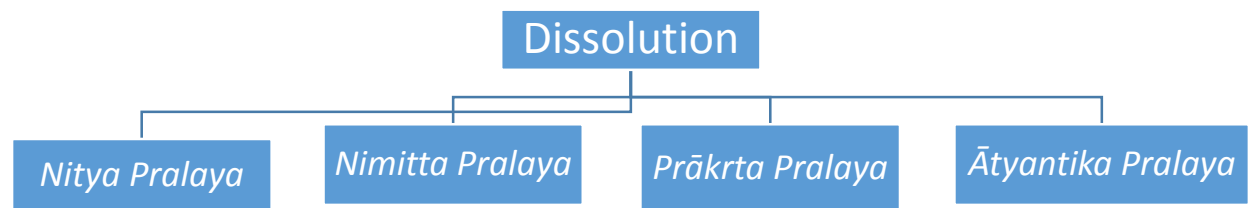


Īśvar

Jiv



Four types of Dissolutions (Pralays)



Fourteen lokas and their inhabitants within each brahmāṇḍa

	<i>Loka</i>	Inhabitants
14	Satyaloka / Brahmaloka	Brahma
13	Tapaloka	
12	Janaloka	Bṛghu and other sages
11	Maharloka	Aryam and other ancestral divinities
10	Svargaloka / Indraloka	Indra and other <i>devatas</i>
9	Bhuvarloka	Impure <i>devatas</i>
8	Mṛtyuloka	Humans
7	Atala	
6	Vitala	<i>Daityas</i>
5	Sutala	
4	Talatala	
3	Mahatala	Nocturnal creatures
2	Rasatala	
1	Pātāla	Serpents

APPENDIX

Philosophical Document: (A translation of the philosophical letter encompassing the principles of Swaminarayan Vedānta written by Pramukha Svamī Mahārāja)

The five entities - *jīva*, *īśvara*, *māyā*, Brahman and Parabrahman - are eternal, existent and forever ontologically distinct.

Parabrahman

Parabrahman Purusottamanārāyaṇa, who is the sovereign of Akṣara, is eternal, supreme, always divine, ever with a form, faultless, above māyā, one and unparalleled, and a *cetana* (sentient) entity. Within his divine Akṣaradhāman, he is seated on a divine throne in his eternally divine, lustrous, and teenage human form, complete with two arms and all other features. He (Parabrahman) is worshipped with *dāsabhāva* (wilful servitude) by the *mūrtimān* (personal) form of Akṣarabrahman and infinite *muktas* (released *jīvātmans* and *īśvarātmans*). These *muktas* have attained a *brāhmitanu* and have attained likeness with Akṣarabrahman. Parabrahman is eternally and innately replete with infinite liberating virtues and devoid of the qualities of *māyā*. He is without deficiency, forever possesses all powers, is all-knowing, and the all-doer. He is the material and efficient cause of all creation. He, while residing in his divine Akṣaradhāman in his *vyatireka* (particular) form, pervades and is the support of infinite *brahmāṇḍas* (universes) in his *anvaya* (all-pervasive) form as their *antaryāmin*. He is always infinitely more powerful than *jīvas*, *īśvaras*, *māyā*, Akṣara *muktas*, and Akṣarabrahman and is their independent controller, inspirer, and *śarīrin* (embodier). By his own wish, he is the giver of the fruits of the actions of all the *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, and is the inspirer of their ability to will, to know, and to do.

Parabrahman Puruṣottamanārāyaṇa, who is imperceptible by *māyic* (worldly) *indriyas* (senses) and *antahkaraṇa* (inner faculties), while remaining in

Akṣaradhāman, by his own divine wish and out of compassion, for the ultimate liberation of infinite *jīvas* and *īśvaras*, and to fulfill the wishes of his devotees, manifests with all his divine virtues, powers, etc., in perceptible human form in each brahmānda and becomes visible to all. That manifest form of Parabrahman Paramātmā is Sahajānanda Svāmī Mahārāja - Śrī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhagavān. Only he is the absolute focus of worship for us all. He always remains entirely manifest in his *anvaya* form through the Akṣarabrahman Guru to forever continue the *upāsana* (worshipful service) of his manifest form even after his disappearance (leaving of his human body).

He (Parabrahman) is the cause of all *avatāras*; he is the *avatārin* and the sovereign of them all. An *avatāra* occurs when He (Parabrahman) pervades a *jīva* or *īśvara* with the wish to fulfill a task. The *cetanas* (beings) of each of these *avatāras* are ontologically and inherently distinct from one another. Like these *avatāras*, the *cetanas* (*ātmans*) of the Caturvyūha, which includes Vasudeva; the twenty-four *avatāras* which include Keśava; and other beings are also ontologically and inherently distinct from one another.

Akṣarabrahman

Akṣarabrahman is distinct from Parabrahman, and like Parabrahman, it is eternal, one, beyond the three guṇas (qualities), a *cetana* (sentient) entity, and forever divine. Replete with infinite liberating virtues and devoid of all *māyic* qualities, it is eternally without faults. This Akṣarabrahman's form, qualities, powers, etc., are dependent only on Parabrahman. By Parabrahman's eternal wish, it is the cause, support, pervader, controller, and *sarīrin* of all creation, which is *jadacidātmaka*?. Although Akṣarabrahman is metaphysically one entity, it serves in different ways through four forms. In its *cidākāśa* form, Akṣarabrahman pervades within and outside infinite *brahmāṇdas* and upholds them.

As an abode (Akṣaradhāman), Akṣarabrahman is the divine abode of 1) Parabrahman; 2) the *mūrtimān* form of Akṣarabrahman, who is in his (Parabrahman's) service; and 3) infinite Akṣara *muktas* (released *jīvātmans* and *īśvarātmans*). There is only one such Akṣaradhāman. It is eternal and forever beyond the three guṇas. Only *muktas*, who have attained qualitative similarity to Akṣarabrahman, are able to enter it. In that same Akṣaradhāman, Akṣarabrahman's form as the personal attendant has, like Parabrahman, a divine human form complete with two arms and all other features. As the ideal for Akṣara *muktas*, he forever remains engrossed in Parabrahman's service.

That very Akṣarabrahman manifests in human form, in each *brahmānda* along with Parabrahman, as the Guru, who is the complete and uninterrupted vessel of Parabrahman. Akṣara can make bound *jīvas* and *īśvaras* of the world *brahmarūpa*, have them attain *uttama nirvikalpa niscaya* (the greatest unwavering conviction) of Parabrahman, attain ultimate liberation, and forever experience the manifest presence. Paramātmā through his (Akṣara's) divine association. He protects the traditions of the *sampradāya* and causes all to experience supreme bliss. Guṇātītānanda Svāmi, Bhagataji Mahārāja, Shastriji Maharaja and Yogiji Maharaja have appeared in this succession of *guṇātīta* Akṣarabrahman Gurus. This succession will continue uninterruptedly. At any given time, the path of ultimate liberation remains open through only one Guru.

Māyā

Māyā is composed of the three *gunas*, eternally changing, *jada*, a material cause of the creation of infinite *brahmāndas*, and Paramātmā's diverse, mysterious power. As the cause of ego and attachment of *jīvas* and of *īśvaras*, this very *māyā* has been the cause of their births and deaths since eternity. Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman are forever entirely untainted by, beyond, and the *śarīrin* of this *māyā*.

Īśvara

An Īśvara is an eternal *cetana* (sentient) entity distinct from Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and *jīvas*. Despite being extremely powerless when compared to Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman, these *īśvaras* bear greater power and knowledge than *jīvas*. Through his wish, Paramātmā inspires them to perform tasks of creation, etc., of the *brahmāndas*. Like the *jīvas*, these *īśvaras* are countless in number, infinitesimal (extremely small), indivisible, and possess other such qualities. They are *jñānasvarūpa*,” *jñātā* (those who know), and eternally bound by *māyā*. They perform righteous and unrighteous *karmas* (actions) and experience the fruits of those actions. Pradhāna Purusa, Virāt Purusa, the deities of their senses (*indriyas*) and the inner faculties (*antahkarana*), Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Mahēśa, and others are all beings of the *īśvara* category, and these *īśvaras* are ontologically and inherently distinct from one another.

Jīva

The *jīva* is an eternal, *cetana* (sentient) entity ontologically distinct from Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, and *īśvaras*. These *jīvas* are countless, infinitesimal (extremely small), indivisible, and possess other such qualities. They are *jñānasvarūpa*, *jñātā* (those who know), and eternally bound by *māyā*. They perform righteous and unrighteous *karmas* (actions) and experience the fruits of those actions.

Spiritual Endeavour and Its Benefits

To attain ultimate liberation, *mumuksus* (spiritual aspirants) should have firm love for Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and the present Akṣarabrahman Guru, through whom Parabrahman is fully and continuously manifest, by having ‘*nirdosa buddhi*’ in them, a feeling of the highest divinity in them, and upon meeting them, a conviction in having met the present form of

Parabrahman. They should greatly please them by firmly associating with them through thought, word, and deed.

Aspirant *jīvas* and *īśvaras* who endeavor in this way, through Parabrahman's grace, having attained *ekāntika dharma* and having become *brahmarūpa*, that is, having attained similarity' to Akṣarabrahman, acquire the highest devotion to Parabrahman. All their miseries and faults are forever destroyed, and they experience the supreme bliss of Paramātmā while alive. By Paramātmā's wish, such a *brahmarūpa* devotee, upon leaving the body, attains Paramātmā's Akṣaradhāman through the Arcimārga. There, having attained a *brāhmic*-body, the devotee forever enjoys divine bliss while offering, with *dāsabhāva*, service in the form of performing darśana of Parabrahman, the Lord of Akṣaradhāman.

The Meaning behind Akṣarapuruṣottama Upāsanā

Akṣarapuruṣottama *upāsanā* is not the *upāsanā* of two entities – Akṣara and Puruṣottama; but it refers to offering *upāsanā* to Puruṣottama having become *Akṣararūpa* - in other words, to offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman having become *brahmarūpa*. When Parabrahman, who travels (manifests) in human form, returns to his abode, he absorbs the powers of the Brahmasvarūpa Guru and himself travels (remains manifest on earth) through him. Therefore, an aspirant who associates with the manifest Guru is, in fact, offering *upāsanā* only to one Paramātmān. The meaning of the Svāminārāyaṇa *mahāmantra* is incorporated in this meaning of Akṣara-Puruṣottama *upāsanā*: That is, to become *svāmirūpa* - *Akṣararūpa*, and offer devotion - *upāsanā* with *dāsabhāva* to Nārāyaṇa - Parabrahman Puruṣottama Nārāyaṇa.

Conclusion

In this way, these philosophical principles are Vedic, eternal, revealed by Śrījī Mahārāja (Svāminārāyaṇa), and propagated by the lineage of guṇātīta gurus. Jaya

Svāminārāyana from Sāstrī Nārāyaṇasvarūpadāsa. Guru Purnimā, Samvata 2064 (18 July 2008), Bocāsana

GLOSSARY

<i>Ācārya:</i>	A term used most commonly to refer to a founder of a <i>darshan</i> , founder of a religious doctrine. A teacher.
<i>Adharma:</i>	That which does not conform to <i>dharma</i> , sinful, non-righteous.
<i>Ahaṁkāra:</i>	Ego.
<i>Ahiṁsā:</i>	Non-injury, in mind, action, and speech.
<i>Ākāśa:</i>	Space.
<i>Akṣara:</i>	Akṣarabrahman, see also Brahma. One of the five eternal ontological entities, beyond <i>māyā</i> but inferior to Parabrahman (God).
<i>Akṣaradhāma:</i>	The divine abode of Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa.
<i>Akṣararūpa:</i>	Like Akṣara. Also, <i>brahmarūpa</i> . This refers to the highest spiritual state, of the liberated soul, wherein a <i>jīva</i> or <i>īśvara</i> attains certain qualities of Akṣarabrahman so that it is free of all <i>māyic</i> influences and can offer the highest devotion to Parabrahman, forever consuming his ultimate bliss.
<i>Amāvasa:</i>	The last day of the dark half of a lunar month.
<i>Āmbāvadī:</i>	Mango orchard.
<i>Aṁga:</i>	A habit, a liking e.g., an <i>Aṁga</i> for <i>kathā</i> , <i>sevā</i> , singing <i>kirtana</i> , <i>dhyāna</i> .
<i>Amṛta:</i>	Nectar which renders immortality.
<i>Aṁtardṛṣṭi:</i>	To look inwards, to introspect.
<i>Anādī:</i>	Without beginning.

<i>Antahkaraṇa:</i>	Composite form of mind, intellect, lower mind, and ego.
<i>Aṇu:</i>	atom, atomic size.
<i>Anumān:</i>	To infer; one of the means to acquiring knowledge.
<i>Anvaya:</i>	“Not separate? When used for Puruṣottama, this term implies his immanent form through which he inherently exists within all sentient beings and insentient matter. This is opposed to his <i>vyatireka</i> (distinct or particular) form.
<i>Apauruṣeya:</i>	‘Uncreated; used to describe <i>Vedas</i> and <i>Upaniṣads</i> .
<i>Archimārg:</i>	The divine path that leads to Akṣaradhāma.
<i>Asata:</i>	Untruth, falsehood.
<i>Āśrama:</i>	Building, stage of life e.g., <i>brahmacarya āśrama</i> , <i>grhastha āśrama</i> .
<i>Aṣṭāṅgayoga:</i>	Eight-fold <i>yoga</i> .
<i>Ātmā:</i>	The pure self.
<i>Ātmaniṣṭhā:</i>	The conviction that one is <i>ātmān</i> .
<i>Ātmika bhāva:</i>	To have a consciousness that one’s true self is <i>ātmān</i> and not the body.
<i>Ātmaṇṭika:</i>	Ultimate, final e.g. <i>ātmaṇṭika kalyāṇa</i> .
<i>Avagūṇa:</i>	Bad or malicious attribute.
<i>Avatāra:</i>	Incarnation.
<i>Avatārī:</i>	The cause of all incarnations.
<i>Avatarvād:</i>	Belief of avatars incarnating on earth.
<i>Avidyā:</i>	Ignorance or anti-knowledge. Also, <i>māyā</i> .
<i>Bhagavad-Gītā:</i>	One of the three sacred texts that comprise the <i>Prasthānatrayī</i> . A historical and spiritual text

	encompassed within the <i>Mahābhārat</i> and contains the spiritual teachings conveyed by Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna.
Bhagavān:	God, Paramātmā, Parabrahman
Bhajana:	To worship, a poem praising Bhagavān.
Bhakta:	Devotee.
Bhaktī:	Devotion, worshipping.
Bhāṣya:	A commentary authored on a sacred text. <i>Bhāṣyas</i> on the <i>Prasthānatrayī</i> are authored in order to establish philosophical principles as Vedic Akṣara-Puruṣottama <i>Darśana</i> .
Bhāvanā:	Feeling, sentiment.
Brahma Muhūrta:	Period of three hours before sunrise.
Brahmā:	This is in the <i>īśvara</i> category. Different from Brahman, who is Akṣarabrahman.
Brahmabhāva:	Qualitative oneness with Brahman; See <i>akṣararūpa</i> .
Brahmacārī:	One who observes <i>Brahmacarya</i> and whose <i>indriyas</i> are immersed in <i>Brahman</i> .
Brahmacarya:	Eight-fold celibacy and being immersed in Brahman. ‘Celibacy’ is only at the physical level. It does not include the mind and <i>ātmān</i> , nor being immersed in Brahman.
Brahman:	Akṣara, one of the five eternal realities, Ideal devotee and abode of Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa.
Brahmarūpa:	See <i>Akṣararūpa</i> .
Brahmasūtra:	One of the three sacred texts of the <i>Prasthānatrayī</i> . Authored by Maharshi Bādarāyan Vyās, the <i>Brahmasūtra</i> has been

	created based on the <i>Upaniṣads</i> ; they interpret and substantiate the principles that have been declared in the <i>Upaniṣads</i> .
<i>Brahmasvarūpa-Guru:</i>	See <i>Akṣarabrahmasvarūpa Guru</i> .
<i>Brahmatanu:</i>	A divine body. One gets in Akṣaradhāma after liberation. The <i>brahmic</i> form.
<i>Brahmavidyā:</i>	Knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman. Also, <i>parāvidyā</i> .
<i>Buddhi:</i>	Intellect (n.b. This is a minimal meaning).
<i>Chaitanya:</i>	‘Sentience’; consciousness; synonymous with <i>cetana</i> .
<i>Chitt:</i>	The lower mind (n.b. This is a limited meaning).
<i>Cidākāśa:</i>	This is the impersonal, shapeless form of Akṣarabrahman; the eternal conscious space that pervades and boulder all of creation.
<i>Cintana:</i>	Reflection, to think.
<i>Cos:</i>	a measure of distance (1 <i>Gujarātī</i> cos = 1.5 miles or 1 league).
<i>Daharākāśh:</i>	A term that refers to <i>chidākāśh</i> within the <i>Chhāndogya</i> Upanishad. See <i>chidākāśh</i> . <i>Daharvidyā</i> , the knowledge of <i>daharākāśh</i> , also known as <i>chidākāśh</i> .
<i>Darśana:</i>	To see. Verb is used only for looking reverentially at God, His <i>sādhu</i> or <i>mūrti</i> , and simultaneously feel that one is being blessed by them.
<i>Dāsbhāva:</i>	The feeling of servitude.
<i>Deva:</i>	Deity.

<i>Dharma:</i>	A term that encompasses: divine law, a path of righteousness, moral duty, ethical conduct, justice, responsibility, religion, and truth. See also <i>ekāntik dharma</i> .
<i>Dharma:</i>	Composite <i>dharma</i> of <i>dharma</i> , <i>jnana</i> , <i>vairāgya</i> and <i>bhakti</i> . Also known as <i>Bhagavad Dharma</i> in <i>Sanātana Dharma's śāstras</i> .
<i>Dikṣā:</i>	Initiation.
<i>Divyabhāva:</i>	To have an attitude of seeing divinity in all the actions of God and His <i>sādhu</i> .
<i>Doṣa:</i>	Bad attribute (a prefix) as in <i>doṣa buddhi</i> .
<i>Droha:</i>	To malign.
<i>Ekāntika</i>	
<i>Ekāntika:</i>	Single-minded, as in <i>ekāntika bhakta</i> .
<i>Ekaṭāṇā:</i>	Form of fasting when only one meal is taken per day.
<i>Garbhagr̥ha:</i>	Sanctum sanctorum in a <i>mandira</i> where the <i>murtis</i> are consecrated.
<i>Goṣṭī:</i>	To discuss the <i>kathā</i> one has heard.
<i>Grantha:</i>	Text. Scripture
<i>Gṛhastha:</i>	Householder.
<i>Guṇa(s):</i>	The attribute(s), of <i>rajas</i> , <i>tamas</i> , and <i>sattva</i> . Also used in a positive way, e.g., ‘to look at his <i>guṇas</i> ’ (virtues).
<i>Guṇātīta</i>	One who is above the three <i>guṇas</i> of <i>rajas</i> , <i>tamas</i> and <i>sattva</i> ; above <i>māyā</i> .
<i>Guru-paramparā:</i>	This refers to the unbroken succession of <i>unātīta Brahmasvarūpa Gurus</i> who serve as the medium

	of Parabrahman on earth through whom he is accessible and ultimate liberation is possible.
<i>Hansa:</i>	The highest order of ascetics.
<i>Havelī:</i>	A grand palatial building, usually with exquisite wooden carvings.
<i>Hunḍī:</i>	A bill of exchange, commonly used in trading before the advent of modern banking.
<i>Indriyas:</i>	The senses, five <i>karma indriyas</i> and five <i>jñāna indriyas</i> .
<i>Iṣṭadeva:</i>	The <i>Bhagavān</i> that is the focus of one's worship.
<i>Īśvara:</i>	One of the five eternal realities, a cosmic being.
<i>Jaḍa:</i>	Inanimate, non-sentient.
<i>Jāgrata:</i>	State of wakefulness.
<i>Jīva</i> or <i>Jīvātmā:</i>	One of the five eternal realities.
<i>Jīvanamukti:</i>	To experience liberation whilst living to attain the <i>brāhmic</i> state in this very body and experience the supreme bliss of Puruṣottama in this world.
<i>Jñāna:</i>	Knowledge, one of the four attributes of <i>ekāntik dharma</i> . The thorough knowledge of ātman and paramātmā.
<i>Kāla:</i>	Time.
<i>Kalyāṇa Yātrā:</i>	Pilgrimage to redeem devotees of God.
<i>Kalyāṇa:</i>	See <i>mokṣa</i> .
<i>Kalyāṇakārī:</i>	Redemptive.
<i>Kāraṇa</i> body:	One of the three bodies of the <i>jīva</i> ; the causal body which comprises of negative attributes, such as ego, possessiveness, greed, and lust.

<i>Karikā:</i>	Verses that conclude each discussion within the Svāmīnārāyaṇa. <i>siddhānt-sudhā vād</i> -text which encapsulate the <i>sampradāy</i> 's principles.
<i>Karma:</i>	Action, deed.
<i>Kathā:</i>	Discourse expounding a <i>śāstra</i> , or God and His <i>bhaktas</i> ’ <i>līlā</i> .
<i>Kirtana:</i>	Poem glorifying <i>Bhagavān</i> or His <i>satpuruṣa</i> .
<i>Kiśora:</i>	A teenager.
<i>Koṣa:</i>	A container made of leather-skin to draw water from a well.
<i>Kusaṅga:</i>	Evil Company.
<i>Lalāṭa:</i>	Forehead.
<i>Līlā:</i>	Divine action (every action of God is <i>līlā</i>).
<i>Mahanta:</i>	Head of a <i>mandira</i> , shrine or <i>maṭha</i> .
<i>Mahārāja:</i>	Short for Śrījī Mahārāja (Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa).
<i>Māhātmya:</i>	Glory and greatness.
<i>Mahimā:</i>	Glory and greatness.
<i>Manana:</i>	Repeated thinking, reflecting.
<i>Mānasīpujā:</i>	<i>Pujā</i> (worship) offered mentally.
<i>Manuṣyabhāva:</i>	To attach human attributes and failings to God and His <i>sādhū</i> .
<i>Maunḍa:</i>	Measure of weight. One <i>maunḍa</i> is equal to 20 kg. Today. 40 kg.
<i>Māyā:</i>	One of the five eternal realities, illusion, <i>avidyā</i> .
<i>Mokṣa:</i>	Final emancipation of the <i>jīva</i> ; deliverance from the cycle of births and deaths and eternal ignorance.
<i>Mudrā:</i>	Coin currency.

<i>mukta:</i>	A <i>jīva</i> or <i>īśvara</i> that has acquired ultimate liberation and who dwells in Akṣaradhāma with a <i>brāhmic</i> body.
<i>Mulakagirī:</i>	Military raid to extort a financial claim.
<i>Mumukṣu:</i>	Spiritual aspirant.
<i>Murti Pujā:</i>	Worship of murti.
<i>Murti:</i>	Image.
<i>Nārāyaṇa:</i>	See Parabrahma(n).
<i>Nirbhayatā:</i>	Fearlessness.
<i>Nirguṇa:</i>	Without attributes of <i>māyā</i> .
<i>Nirvikalpa Samādhi:</i>	The state of ultimate realization.
<i>Nirvikalpa:</i>	“Without alternatives or doubts? Adjective utilized to describe conviction. Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa specifies three levels of <i>nirvikalpa</i> conviction. When one becomes <i>akṣararūpa</i> and offers worship to Puruṣottama, one is said to possess the highest level of <i>nirvikalpa</i> conviction. This state is also referred to as <i>nirvikalp samādhi</i> .
<i>Niṣedha:</i>	The “don’ts” - those which one should avoid (in contrast to <i>vidhi</i>).
<i>Niṣṭhā:</i>	Proficiency, steadiness, perfection, single-mindedness (e.g. <i>svarūpaniṣṭhā</i> , <i>ātmaniṣṭhā</i> , <i>bhaktiniṣṭhā</i>).
<i>Nitya:</i>	Eternal.
<i>Oraḍi:</i>	Small room e.g. Akṣara <i>Oraḍi</i> .
<i>Oraḍo:</i>	Room (pl. <i>oraḍo</i>).
<i>Pahora:</i>	Unit of time - equivalent to three hours.
<i>Pānca:</i>	Five (e.g. <i>pānca viśayas</i> , <i>pānca vartamānas</i>).

Parabrahman:	Bhagavān Puruṣottama (Supreme Reality).
<i>Parama-</i>	
<i>Parama:</i>	Highest, ultimate.
Paramātmā:	See Parabrahma (n).
Parameśvara:	See Parabrahma (n).
<i>Paraṃparā:</i>	Lineage, usually of spiritual <i>gurus</i> .
<i>Pāṭhaśālā:</i>	A place of learning, a school or college.
<i>Pativrata:</i>	Chaste, loyal e.g. a <i>Pativratā bhakta</i> - chaste devotee, a <i>Pativratā</i> -chaste wife.
<i>Pharālī</i> foods:	Foods edible on day of <i>Ekādaśī</i> e.g. tubers such as potatoes, cassawa, suran, dairy products, fruits, nuts, tomatoes, cabbage, <i>dudhī</i> (marrow); some forms of grain - morio, raggare.
<i>Prabhāta:</i>	Morning.
Pradhāna puruṣa:	emerges from <i>māyā</i> . Cosmic being.
<i>Pragaṭa:</i>	Manifest e.g. Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa is today <i>pragaṭa</i> through Mahanta Svāmī Mahārāja.
<i>Prahara:</i>	See Pahor.
<i>Prakṛti:</i>	Māyā
<i>Prārabdha:</i>	One of three types of <i>karmas</i> ; those which have ripened to form this present human body and which have to be borne till death.
<i>Prasthānatrayī:</i>	This is the collective term for the triadic <i>Vedānta</i> canon, namely, the <i>Upaniṣads</i> , <i>Brahmasūtra</i> and <i>Bhagavad Gītā</i> . These three are authentic scriptures through which the philosophical principles are established.
<i>Prātaḥkāla:</i>	Morning period.

<i>Pujā:</i>	Ritual of worship with materials such as <i>Kumakuma</i> , sandalwood paste, rice, flowers.
<i>Punama:</i>	See <i>Purnimā</i> .
<i>Punya:</i>	A measure of spiritual merit, opposite to sin.
<i>Purnimā:</i>	Full moon. The last day of <i>sud pakṣa</i> .
<i>Puruṣottama:</i>	See Parabrahma(n).
<i>Rājīpo:</i>	grace from God or the <i>Guru</i> .
<i>Sadguru:</i>	A high ranking <i>sādhū</i> , also a realised <i>sādhū</i> .
<i>Sādhana:</i>	Instrument, a means to an end.
<i>Sāadhanā:</i>	Spiritual endeavor.
<i>Sādhū:</i>	A Hindu ascetic.
<i>Sākār:</i>	With form.
<i>Samādhi:</i>	Trance associated with higher consciousness.
<i>Samaiyā:</i>	Festival (a term commonly used in the <i>sampradāya</i>).
<i>Sampadrāya:</i>	An organization that follows the truthful sermons (<i>sat-upadeśa</i>) given by a succession of spiritual <i>gurus</i> .
<i>Sasāṃra:</i>	Course of mundane life, worldly existence.
<i>Sat:</i>	Truth.
<i>Satī:</i>	Chaste woman, also a woman who immolated herself on the cremation pyre of her dead husband.
<i>Satkāryavāda:</i>	The doctrine of causality that accepts an effect is preexistent in its cause as a different state. Svāmīnārāyaṇa believes in <i>satkāryavāda</i> .
<i>Satpuruṣa:</i>	The <i>sādhū</i> who has a constant rapport with God, the <i>Guṇātīta Sādhū</i> .

<i>Satsaṃga:</i>	Synonym for the <i>Svāmīnārāyaṇa Sampradāya</i> , also used as a verb, meaning to be in the company of <i>sādhus</i> , to study <i>śāstras</i> .
<i>Satsaṃgī:</i>	A member of the <i>satsaṃga</i> .
<i>Sevā:</i>	Selfless service (usually, but not necessarily meaning physical service).
<i>Shaddarshan:</i>	The collective term for the six prominent Vedic darśanas, which include (1) <i>Sāṃkhya Darśana</i> (2) <i>Yoga Darśana</i> (3) <i>Nyāy Darśana</i> (4) <i>Vaiśeṣika Darśana</i> (5) <i>Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana</i> (6) <i>Vedānta Darśana</i> .
<i>Shāstra:</i>	A text by which self-governance and self-control (e.g., <i>Śruti shāstras</i> , <i>Śikṣāpatrī</i>) are imbibed and which truthfully throws light upon a subject. (e.g. <i>Brahma Sutras</i> , <i>Vacanāmṛta</i>)- <i>Shāsanat shamsanat shāstram</i> .
<i>Siddhānta:</i>	A conclusive principle or doctrine,
<i>Siddhāntic:</i>	Of or pertaining to <i>siddhānta</i> ; doctrinal.
<i>Śloka:</i>	Verse. A mantra of the <i>Vedas</i> ; can also refer to the <i>Vedas</i> .
<i>Smṛti:</i>	To recall, to remember a divine episode of God or <i>satpuruṣa</i> .
<i>Smṛtis:</i>	The Remembered texts - the <i>Upaniṣads</i> , as well as texts by Yājñavalkya, Manu, Parāśara etc. (Loyā 9).
<i>Śrutis:</i>	The Revealed texts - the Four <i>Vedas</i> .
<i>Sthula</i> body:	One of the three bodies of the <i>jīva</i> ; the gross body which is formed from the five elements.
<i>Sud pakṣa:</i>	Bright half of lunar month.

<i>Sūkṣma</i> body:	One of the three bodies of the <i>jīva</i> ; the subtle body which comprises the mind, senses and others.
<i>Śuṣka-Vedāntīs</i> :	A cult of people who believe they are <i>Brahman</i> and above the observance of the codes of <i>dharma</i> .
<i>Suṣupti</i> :	One of the three states of the <i>jīva</i> ; the state of deep sleep, where one does not even dream.
<i>Suṣupti</i> :	State of deep sleep, during which an individual is totally devoid of any form of perception.
<i>Sutra</i> :	An aphorism, which is characterized by “that which is composed of few words, is clear, does not contain long sentences, and is capable of expressing the essential message.”
<i>Svāmī</i> :	A <i>sādhu</i> , also - master, guardian.
<i>Svāmīnārāyaṇa mahāmantra</i> :	The doctrinal <i>mantra</i> given by Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa which devotees of the <i>Svāmīnārāyaṇa Sampradāy</i> regularly chant.
<i>Svāmīnārāyaṇabhāṣya</i> :	A commentary on all three sacred texts of the <i>Prasthāntṛayi</i> . This text thoroughly substantiates the Akṣarapuruṣottama <i>Darśana</i> ’s principles as being Vedic through its correlation of Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa’s teachings with scriptural revelations.
<i>Svāmīnārāyaṇa-siddhānt-sudhā</i> :	A <i>vād</i> text that is written in Sanskrit. This text is a detailed exposition of the <i>sampradāy</i> ’s principles. The principles substantiated within the <i>Svāmīnārāyaṇa- bhāṣya</i> are categorically

	presented and thoroughly discussed within the <i>vāḍ</i> text.
<i>Svāmīnīvāto:</i>	A historical and authentic compilation of the teachings conveyed by Akṣarabrahma Guṇātītānanda Svāmī, the First spiritual successor of Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa. One of the principal texts of the <i>Svāmīnārāyaṇa Sampradāy</i> .
<i>Svāmīsevakbhāy:</i>	The sentiments that a servant has for one's master. Relationship that Akṣara and <i>akṣaramuktas</i> maintain with Parabrahman.
<i>Svapana:</i>	Dream state.
<i>Svapana:</i>	One of the three states of the <i>jīva</i> ; the state in which one perceives dreams during sleep.
<i>Tamas:</i>	Part of <i>māyā</i> ; ignorance, darkness.
<i>Tāṃtrika:</i>	One who practices <i>Tantra</i> .
<i>Tantra:</i>	Body of text containing magical formularies for the worship of deities or the attainment of superhuman powers.
<i>Tyāgī:</i>	One who has renounced worldly life, an ascetic, a <i>sādhu</i> . It is not a life of homelessness - as believed by western scholars - since he accepts the whole world as his home.
<i>Upāsanā:</i>	To offer worship to God, by believing Him to be: <i>sarvoparī</i> (the Cause of all incarnations), <i>sada divya sākāra</i> (eternally with divine form), <i>kartā</i> (the all-doer), and <i>pragaṭa</i> (manifest).
<i>Utsava:</i>	Festival. See also <i>Samaiyā</i> .
<i>Vacana:</i>	Word, promise.

<i>Vad Pakṣa:</i>	Dark half of lunar month.
<i>Vairāgya:</i>	Detachment from material objects and pursuits.
<i>Varṇa:</i>	Social order of <i>Brahmin</i> , <i>Kṣatriya</i> , <i>Vaiśya</i> and <i>Śudra</i> . ‘Caste’ is a misnomer, a derogatory term coined by early colonial visitors and writers.
<i>Vartamāna:</i>	Vow, as in <i>pāṃca vartamānas</i> of <i>sādhus</i> .
<i>Vāsanā:</i>	Mundane desire; unfulfilled desires and impressions of past <i>karmas</i> .
<i>Vidhi:</i>	Merged with the <i>jīva</i> . Rules and rituals that are to be observed - the “do’s” (as opposed to <i>niṣedha</i> - the “don’ts”).
<i>Vidyā:</i>	Knowledge.
<i>Virya:</i>	The vital fluid, whose conservation in the body is obligatory for <i>brahmacarya</i> .
<i>Viśayas:</i>	The sense objects, especially <i>pāṃca viśayas</i> - word, touch, sight, taste, and smell.
<i>Viveka:</i>	To be able to discriminate between truth and untruth.
<i>Vrata:</i>	A vow or observance, usually concerning diet.

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A Synopsis
of the thesis submitted for
Ph.D. Degree in Sanskrit

Research Topic for Ph. D.

**“Analytical Study of The Prasthānatrayī Svāminarāyaṇa
Bhāṣyam in Light of Svāminarāyaṇ’s Vacanāmṛta”**

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November - 2021

ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE PRASTHĀNATRAYĪ SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆ BHĀṢYAS IN LIGHT OF SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA'S VACANĀMṚTA

I. Introduction

In the Indian Vedantic tradition, the Prasthānatrayī holds significant prominence. Great teachers from Adi Śaṅkarācārya's era to contemporary times have established and authenticated their doctrines on the basis of Prasthānatrayī. In the Prasthānatrayī, the three canons are included; the Upaniṣads, the Bhagavadgītā, and the Brahmasūtras. Although Svāminārāyaṇa did not commission the writings of Bhāṣyam or commentary on the Prasthānatrayī in his time. Two centuries later, commentaries (henceforth Bhāṣyam) based on his philosophical principles were written and unequivocally acclaimed. With HDH Pramukha Svāmī Mahārāja's inspiration and blessings, Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa authored the Bhāṣhyas on the Prasthānatrayī. This is indeed a great work in the field of Indian philosophical system in our time.

Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa claims that this Bhāṣyam, on the Prasthānatrayī, represents the eternal Vedic ideology proclaimed by Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa. Essentially, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa has evidently elucidated all his fundamental philosophical principles in his Vacanāmṛta. The Vacanāmṛta is the most authentic scripture of the Svāminārāyaṇa faith. It is a historical monument that is compiled in front of Swaminarayan's eyes.

This thesis comparatively analyzes the principles between the Vacanāmṛta and the Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam of Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa to determine to what proportion the Bhāṣyam accords with the principles of Bhagavān

Svāminārāyaṇa encoded in the Vacanāmṛta. Therefore, by critically analyzing Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa's commentaries in light of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's Vacanāmṛta, this thesis intends to bring forth a valid conclusion.

The Problems and Solution

When we talk about the principles, which were given by Svāminārāyaṇa two hundred years ago, are authored today into the scholastic way on the base of prasthānatrayī, it provokes many issues regarding the authenticity of the teaching of Svāminārāyaṇa and the principles shaped by the bhashykar according to the prasthānatrayī. Since, the period of two hundred years is enough to change the phenomenon of social, religious, and moral aspects of any particular region. Consequently, these changes can also be perceived in the various other writings which are stood at two different and vast time zone.

In addition to this, the Vacanāmṛta is in the Gujarati language which differs from our modern Gujarati. The Vacanāmṛta is nothing but the spiritual discourses delivered by Svāminārāyaṇa in front of the assembly. Although, Svāminārāyaṇa reflects his unique philosophy in the form of the Vacanāmṛta, yet his teachings were very simple and practical and applicable in nature which is a significantly different attitude as compare to the Bhāṣyam tradition. On the other hand, in the Bhāṣyam tradition, the Sanskrit language is a vital life. In the modern world, only a few people know this high profile language. Moreover, you can not find a person today who is living his spiritual life by reading the Bhāṣyam. So due to the two different time zone, different languages different backgrounds and different natures of these two scriptures, it was a challenging task to conduct research on the topic.

As a solution, I am very fortunate that I came across a live guruparmapara. Today Svāminārāyaṇa's sixth spiritual successor and guru HDH Mahant Svāmī Mahārāja is present here. The teachings of Svāminārāyaṇa, the mystery of the ancient texts, depth

of spiritual principles, and a practical day to day spiritual life, which was understood directly from him.

The second benefit for me was the availability of the Bhāṣyakāra. In the entire world, the only Vedānta Bhāṣyakāra Bhadrēśadāsa is living on earth today. In this way, we discussed the thesis topics and got guidance from him. He taught the Bhāṣyas us in a regular class. Since we are living in the same monastery so almost every day, I grabbed the opportunity to understand various subjects of the Bhāṣyas.

Hence, with the help of this above-mentioned solution, in this thesis, I have conducted an analysis of the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam in light of Svāminārāyaṇa's Vacanāmṛta.

An example

In numerous readings, the Vacanāmṛta describes Puruṣottama as a distinct ontological entity that is beyond Akṣara. Svāminārāyaṇa explains, “At the time of creation Puruṣottama Bhagavān who is **akṣarātīta** glances towards Akṣara.” (Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā 1/41). Here, Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa clearly states that Puruṣottama Bhagavān is beyond Akṣara. A similar elaboration is provided in the Muṇḍakopaniṣat-Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam's exposition of “Akṣarāt parataḥ paraḥ.” (Muṇḍakopaniṣad 2/1/2)

The commentary upholds the above-mentioned teaching of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa by elaborating on the distinct meanings expressed by the two instances of the word ‘para’ that appear within this mantra. When both instances are understood in the manner proposed, the mantra is read to express: “Puruṣottama is superior than the superior Akṣara.” The commentary clarifies that the mantra reveals Akṣara is superior in that it is greater than the jīvas, īśvaras, and māyā; and as a result, is identified as para; whereas Puruṣottama is identified as ‘parātparaḥ’ - superior than the superior Akṣara. The resemblance of the commentary's exposition

of the mantra with that of Svāminārāyaṇa revelation in the Vacanāmṛta (Vacanāmṛta Gaḍhaḍā 1/41) expresses not only that the commentary adheres to the teachings of the Vacanāmṛta, but also that the teachings of the Vacanāmṛta afford a particular interpretation of the Muṇḍakopaniṣad.

Significance of the Study

As described earlier, the Vacanāmṛta is considered to be principal sacred text of the Svāminārāyaṇa saṃpradāya and the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. The Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam offers a comprehensive exposition of the various texts of the Prasthānatrayī according to the principles of the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana. By evaluating the principles expressed within both texts, this work serves as a bridge that defines the relationship between the Vacanāmṛta and the SvāminārāyaṇaBhāṣyam. In addition, by presenting this relationship, this work also indirectly examines how Upaniṣadic revelations are reflected within Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings. As such, this project serves as a means through which scholars, students, and aspirants may understand not only the role, significance, and relationship between the Vacanāmṛta and the SvāminārāyaṇaBhāṣyam, but also how their expositions contribute to the larger darśanic dialogue.

The focus of the research

The research work conducts its analysis by focusing on the evaluation of the SvāminārāyaṇaBhāṣyam's expositions as they are presented within the Vacanāmṛta in context of the following three categories: the darśana's pramāṇa-mīmāṃsā (epistemology), tattva-mīmāṃsā (metaphysics), and mukti-mīmāṃsā (soteriology). Specifically, investigations within these categories will involve comparing the Vacanāmṛta's revelation and the SvāminārāyaṇaBhāṣyam's interpretation and exposition of, among others. In addition to this, the scope of my thesis is too broad, more specifically, it includes all the Prasthānatrayī-SvāminārāyaṇaBhāṣyam, so due

to a practical problem I did not include all the references on a particular topic; nevertheless, I have not left any topic or subtopic in the thesis without direct or indirect references from both scriptures the SvāminārāyaṇaBhāṣyam and the Vacanāmṛta. Most importantly, to take a principle and analyze it from both of the scriptures and the viewpoints of the respective authors were demanding hundreds of pages; therefore I prominently focused on it.

Chapter - I

Introduction

This chapter figures out some basic introduction of principles that provide a strong foundation to understand the Vedic Indian tradition on which the building of this thesis is located. The six ancient darshans; Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedānta are briefly introduced here. Moreover, the six prominent Vaidika darśanas; Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvait, Dvaitādvaita, Śuddhādvaita, and Acintyabhedābheda; are narrated here, which play a vital role to differentiate the Svāminārāyaṇa darśana from those darśanas.

The introduction of the Prasthānatrayī- shastras (Upanishad, Gītā, Brahmasūtra) and the Bhāṣya tradition enrich this chapter. As far as Svāminārāyaṇa tradition is concerned we have briefly provided the life and work of Svāminārāyaṇa and its live guruparaṃparā. More importantly, the two scriptures the Vacanāmṛta and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas which play a major role in the thesis are deeply introduced in the chapter. The entire introductory chapter is structured in such a manner that even an outsider can understand the basic principles of the thesis.

Chapter – 2

Analysis on the Basis of Pramāṇamīmāṃsā (Epistemology)

This chapter focuses on the Indian Pramāṇa tradition, which is concerned with the means and criteria of valid empirical knowledge and correct cognition. Although all

the famous and traditionally accepted pramāṇas in the Indian philosophical systems are analyzed here on the basis of the Vacanāmṛta and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas, such as perception, inference, verbal testimony, analogy, etc. yet this chapter aims to decipher some unique stars in the sky of epistemology.

In this manner, As far as the number of pramanas is concerned, the Svāminārāyaṇa tradition harbors totally different attitudes. For example, The Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam clearly mentions the significance of Pramāṇa (BSSB-1/1/1, 1/1/3; KeUSB-1/3; BUSB-2/4/5), however, like Svāminārāyaṇa, the Bhāṣyakāra is not bound with the fixed numbers of Pramāṇa. He averred- “ब्रह्मब्रह्मपरौ प्रमाणशतकैर्मयाऽधिपौ कीर्तितौ” (SSS- Maṅgalam -1).

Along with this, the pramnyam of pramāṇa also depends on Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman along with the guru, they are indeed determinant and cause of all Pramāṇa and Pramā (knowledge), they are the cause of intellect that obtains knowledge and provide the knowledge to a seeker and are knowable. Their grace is indispensable to attain true knowledge. The discussion between logic, Shastra, and the Guru also provides a special feature to this chapter. At the end of this chapter, khyativada of the Svāminārāyaṇa school is presented as well.

Chapter – 3

Analysis on the Basis of Tatvamīmāṃsā (Metaphysics)

In this chapter, the Metaphysics of Svāminārāyaṇa school is analyzed based on the Vacanāmṛta and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas. Metaphysics is related to the study of the eternal ontological entity or entities in a particular belief system.¹ Svāminārāyaṇa reveals straightforwardly, “From all the Vedas, Purāṇas, Itihāsa and Smṛti scriptures, I have gleaned the principle that jīva, māyā, Īśvara, Brahman and

¹ Brahmadarshandas Sadhu, Vachanmrit Rahashya, Pg. 2, Svāminārāyaṇa Aksharpith, 4th Edition Aug. 2004.

Parameśvara are all eternal.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/10). Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam confirms, “जीवेश्वरमायाब्रह्मरूपमुक्तादिसर्वेभ्यः परभूताद् ... अक्षरात्.... परभूतः ...परमात्मा ।”²

In the history of world philosophy, this is indeed the matchless principle of Svāminārāyaṇa school. It has been analyzed as a key factor in this chapter and provided elucidation on each entity with its nature, form, and function. Moreover, the chapter defines a clear distinction and relation among these ontological entities. The creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the cosmos are discussed and Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahma elaborated as its cause with critical argumentations. In addition to this, the narration of Akṣarabrahman as transcending maya is the most naval contribution to this chapter.

Chapter – 4

Analysis on the Basis of SādhanaMīmāṃsā (Spiritual endeavors)

This chapter deals with the spiritual endeavor or Sādhana a seeker has to perform in order to attain the ultimate reality. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and his Gunātīta Sādhus have lived and taught a unique and practical path of spiritual sādhanā that leads to the realization of Ātman, Brahman, and Paramātmā. We made this sādhana as our subject matter and analyzed it through the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam in light of the Vacanāmṛta.

The primary tool described here is a distinction and significance of self-effort and God’s grace. The chapter explicitly corroborated it. Then we moved to enunciate the most fundamental factor of the Svāminārāyaṇa sādhanā, Brahmabhava, which includes almost every spiritual sādhanā. To become brahmarūpa and offer upāsana to Parabrahman is the prominent sādhanā of the

² 5/2, *Mundaka Upanishad Svāminārāyaṇa Bhashya*, Sadhu Bhadreshdas (December 2009, Svāminārāyaṇa Aksharpith, Ahmedabad)

tradition. Further, we have described the ekāntika dharma and its components (Dharm, Jñāna, Vairāgya, Bhakti). Refuge (āśraya), dīkṣā, niyama, general sādhanā, and atonement were the proficient points for the discussion in this chapter.

Our sādhanā chapter provides a detailed description of the importance of the Brahmasvarūpa Guru by which all aspirants can succeed in their spiritual quest and experience the ultimate bliss of God.

Chapter – 5

Analysis on the Basis of Mukti Mīmāṃsā (Soteriology)

Soteriology is the study of the divine accomplishment of the salvation³ of humanity; In Indian philosophy, soteriology can be defined as attaining Mokṣa. this chapter explains the fruit, the ultimate goal of the spiritual endeavors performed by a seeker. Within the Akṣara-Puruṣottama Darśana, Here we have provided a lengthy description that devotees have a relationship with Akshar and Puruṣottama in the Sādhanadaśā and also after attaining mukti. Mukti defined as becoming akṣararūpa and offering bhakti to Puruṣottama with dāsabhāva. Thus, even in the state of mukti, one, upon becoming brahmarūpa, continuously offers upāsanā to Puruṣottama with dāsabhāva.

Considering it in the background the chapter discusses the nature of bondage and liberation. In the liberation jīvanmukti and videhamukti has been elucidated. Moreover, by the oneness with Brahman one does not becomes Brahman or Parabrahman after becoming a jīvanmukta or videhmukta. This topic is corroborated with a large series of arguments. The way to the abode (Arcirādi Mārga), The state of mukti in the abode, brāhmī tanu (body of a mukta), the relation between God and

³ Definition of salvation in Christianity: Oxford, 2nd Ed. 1989: "The saving of the soul; the deliverance from sin and its consequences"

a mukta are discussed at length in this chapter. This chapter provides an efficient analysis of those prominent principles regarding soteriology described in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyam and the Vacanāmṛta.

Chapter – 6

Conclusion

The Vacanāmṛta is a principal sacred text of the Svāminārāyaṇa Saṃpradāya (religious tradition) delivered by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa himself. After two hundred years of Svāminārāyaṇa's time, the Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam are authored by Sādhu Bhadrēśadās.

This thesis analyzed and assessed the main doctrinal interpretations provided within the Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam and the Vacanāmṛta. The current study accumulated the number of factors where both scriptures propagate the same idea. After analyzing a number of examples, the findings clearly suggest that the Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam thoroughly follows the Vacanāmṛta's principles. We can conclude by saying that Sādhu Bhadrēśadāsa has put the philosophical principle of Svāminārāyaṇa found in the Vacanāmṛta, in a scholastic way. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for them who intend to conduct research on the Svāminārāyaṇa-Darśana.

Analytical Study of the Prasthānatrayī Svāminarāyaṇa Bhāṣya in Light of Svāminarāyaṇa's Vacanāmṛta

*A Thesis Submitted to
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in Sanskrit*

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DECEMBER - 2021**

CHAPTER -6

CONCLUSION

1. Study of the Vedanta Darśana

Vedanta (*Veda* + *anta*) means the ending part of the Vedas. It is a specific reference to the *Upaniṣads* and the philosophy they contain. Vedanta is one of the six *Darśanas* or philosophies of Hinduism. It is also known as *Uttara Mīmāṃsā* or *Brahma Mīmāṃsā*. The first systematic study of philosophy seems to have been done by Bādarāyaṇa in the *Brahmasūtras*. The school derives its philosophy mainly from the Vedas in general as well as the *Upaniṣads*, *Brahmasūtras* (also known as *Vedantasūtras*), and *BhagavadGītā*. They are the foundational texts of the school of Vedanta and are collectively identified as the *Prasthānatrayī*.

The principal concepts of Vedanta include the nature of reality, the forms of Parabrahman, Brahman, *māyā*, *īśvara*, and *ātman* or *jīva* and their relationship. Moreover, it encompasses the cause of creation, nature of bondage, means of liberation, states of consciousness, self-purification, transmigration of *ātman*, and the practice of *yoga* and meditation. We analytically studied all these topics here on the basis of the *Prasthānatrayī Svāmīnārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas* and the *Vacanāmṛta*.

2. New Era of Darśana Tradition

Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa's *Siddhānta* (doctrinal philosophy) is the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana* or Akṣarapuruṣottama Vedanta or *Svāmīnārāyaṇa Darshan*. Through its revelation, Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa provided a unique, unprecedented contribution to Vedic knowledge. Whatever he taught in his time is still available in the form of the *Vacanāmṛta*, a prominent scripture of the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* faith. His successors, Akṣarabrahman Guṇātītānanda Svāmi, Brahmasvarūpa Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī Mahārāja and Yogījī Mahārāja

continued this legacy. Continuing the philosophical work of his ancestors Gurus Brahmasvarūpa Pramukha Svāmi Mahārāja spread Svāmīnārāyaṇa's teaching throughout the world. Through his wish and blessings, Mahāmahopādhyāya Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa authored commentaries (*bhāṣyas*) on the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Brahmasūtra*.

3. The Theme of the Thesis

Two centuries later, commentaries (henceforth *bhāṣya*) in the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* School were written and unequivocally acclaimed. The author of the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa claims that this *bhāṣya*, on the *Prasthānatrayī*, represents the eternal Vedic ideology proclaimed by Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa. Essentially, Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa has evidently elucidated all his fundamental philosophical principles in his *Vacanāmṛta*. The *Vacanāmṛta* is the most authentic scripture of the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* faith. It is a historical monument that was compiled in the physical presence of Svāmīnārāyaṇa.

When we talk about the principles, which were given by Svāmīnārāyaṇa two hundred years ago, are authored today into the scholastic way on the base of *Prasthānatrayī*, it provokes many issues regarding the authenticity of the teaching of Svāmīnārāyaṇa and the principles shaped by the Bhāṣyakāra according to the *Prasthānatrayī*. The period of two hundred years is enough to change the phenomenon of social, religious, and moral aspects of any particular region. Consequently, these changes can also be perceived in the various other writings, which stand at two different and vast time zone.

This thesis comparatively analyzes the principles between the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāmīnārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam* of Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa to determine to what proportion the *Bhāṣyam* accords with the principles of Bhagavān Svāmīnārāyaṇa encoded in the *Vacanāmṛta*. Therefore, by critically analyzing

Sādhū Bhadrēśādāsa's commentaries in light of Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa's *Vacanāmṛta*, this thesis intends to bring forth a valid finding as below. We will now review the central principles of the Akṣarapuruṣottama *Darśana* that have been covered within this book.

4. The Essence of the Thesis

Before we move to provide an analysis of all the chapters, let us present the essence of both the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta*. Collectively we use the term 'Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana' for them:

- The Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana* or Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is distinct and independent from *Advait*, *Vishishtādvait*, *Dvait*, *Shuddhādvait* and all other *darśanas*.
- The Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is the name of the philosophical doctrine established by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa.
- The Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana is the essence of Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa's teachings; it is the essence of the *Vacanāmṛta*.
- Epistemologically, the Svāminārāyaṇa Darśana accepts all *pramāṇas* which are helpful to know Akṣarapuruṣottama. Akṣarapuruṣottama are the ultimate knowers, by their grace, all type of knowledge is imbibed by *jīvas* and *īśvaras*.
- Metaphysically, this *darśana* asserts the eternal distinction between the following five ontological entities: Parabrahman, Akṣarabrahman, *māyā*, *īśvara*, and *jīva*.
- Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman transcend *māyā*, whereas *jīvas* and *īśvaras* are in the clutch of *māyā*.
- Akṣarabrahman serves through the following four forms: (1) *chidākāśh*, (2) the divine abode of Puruottama, (3) the personal form forever in the service of Puruṣottama within Akṣaradhāma and (4) the present manifest Guru.

- Puruṣottama Parabrahman is supreme, the all-doer, forever with a form, eternally divine, forever manifest through the Akṣarabrahman Guru, and possesses infinite virtues.
- The Svāmīnārāyaṇa Darśana is the *brahmavidyā* of the *Upaniṣads*, the *adhyātmavidyā* of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *brahmagnān* of the *Brahmasūtra*.
- The essential message of this *darśana* is to become *brahmarūpa* and offer *upāsanā* and *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dāsbhāva*.
- The essence of *sāadhanā* is to please Bhagavān by becoming *akṣararupa* (*brahmarūpa*) and offering *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dāsbhāva*. This *bhakti* is accompanied by attributes such as *dharma*, *jñāna*, and *vairāgya* to Puruṣottama with *dāsbhāva*.
- Within the *Svāmīnārāyaṇa* word, the term Svāmī refers to Akṣara and the term ‘Nārāyaṇa’ refers to Puruṣottama Parabrahman. The terms ‘Svāmīnārāyaṇa’ and ‘Akṣara-Puruṣottama’ are synonymous.
- According to the teachings of Parabrahman Svāmīnārāyaṇa himself, the terms Svāmī and ‘Akṣara’ found within “Svāmīnārāyaṇa’ and ‘Akṣara-Puruṣottama refer to Guṇātītānanda Svāmī, whereas the terms ‘Nārāyaṇa’ and ‘Puruṣottama’ refer to himself, Sahajānanda Śrīhari.
- One thoroughly realizes the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Siddhānta* and attains ultimate *mukti* (liberation) through the firm association with the *Akṣarabrahmasvarupa* Guru.
- The Svāmīnārāyaṇa Darśana accepts two types of *mukti*
 1. *Jīvanamukti* and 2. *Videhamukti*.
- The Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana* continues as a thriving and living *darshan* today through the creation of thousands of *mandirs* and the continuous practice of its traditions, which include wearing a *kaṇṭhi*, performing daily *pujā*, and offering daily prayers. Today, under the leadership of Pragaṭa

Brahmasvarūp Maṃhata Svāmī Mahārāja, hundreds of thousands of devotees continue to strengthen their conviction in the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana*.

5. Analysis of Chapters

5.1 Chapter 1

This is an introductory chapter, which provides the foundation to understand the philosophical principles found in the Svāminārāyaṇa *Darśana*.

SN	TOPIC	ENUNCIATION	FINDINGS
1.	Vedic <i>Darśana</i> Tradition	1. <i>Sāṃkhya Darśana</i> 2. <i>Yoga Darśana</i> 3. <i>Nyāya Darśana</i> 4. <i>Vaiśeṣika Darśana</i> 5. <i>Karmamīmāṃsā Darśana</i> 6. <i>Vedānta Darśana</i>	<i>Darśana</i> is a sincere, mature, and diligent spiritual reflection aimed at attaining the ultimate truth. Over time, this contemplation resulted in the gradual emergence of various streams of philosophical thought within India.
2.	Vedānta <i>Darśana</i>	1. <i>Advaitā Darśana</i> (Ādi Śaṃkara) 2. <i>Viśiṣṭādvaita Darśana</i> (Rāmānuja) 3. <i>Dvaita Darśana</i> (Madhvācārya) 4. <i>Dvaitādvaita Darśana</i> (Nimbārka) 5. <i>Śuddha Advaitā Darśana</i> (Vallabhā)	The <i>Upaniṣads</i> are known as Vedānta. Therefore, the school of philosophy that is based on the <i>Upaniṣads</i> is the Vedānta <i>Darśana</i> . The essence of the <i>Upaniṣads</i> is <i>brahmavidyā</i> .

		6. <i>Acintyabhedābheda Darśana</i> (Caitanya Mahāprabhu)	
3.	<i>The Prasthānatrayī</i>	1. <i>The Upaniṣads</i> 2. <i>Śrīmad Bhagavata Gītā</i> 3. <i>The Brahmasūtras</i>	<i>Prasthān</i> means a <i>śāstra</i> that establishes principles, and the suffix <i>trayī</i> indicates a quantity of three. The three <i>śāstras</i> which comprise the <i>Prasthānatrayī</i> are the <i>Upaniṣads</i> , <i>Śrīmad Bhagavata Gītā</i> , and <i>Brahmasūtras</i> . These <i>śāstras</i> are named <i>prasthān</i> because it is only through them that philosophical principles are established (<i>prasthāpan</i>).
4.	The Svāminārāyaṇa Tradition	1. Life and Work of <i>Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa</i> 2. Philosophy 3. <i>The Vacanāmṛta</i> 4. <i>The Guruparamparā</i>	Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa provided a unique, unprecedented contribution to Vedic knowledge. Whatever he taught in his time is still available in the form of the <i>Vacanāmṛta</i> , a prominent scripture of the Svāminārāyaṇa faith. His successors, Akṣarabrahman

			Guṇātītānanda Svāmi, Brahmasvarūpa Bhagatajī Mahārāja, Śāstrījī Mahārāja, Yogījī Mahārāja, Pramukha Svāmi Mahārāja and Mahanta Svāmi Mahārāja continued this legacy.
5.	The <i>Prasthānatrayī-Svāmīnarayan-Bhāṣya</i>	1. The commentator 2. Characteristics of the commentary 3. <i>The Svāmīnarayan-Siddhānta-Sudhā</i>	Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa has vested meticulous effort in authoring the commentaries on the <i>Prasthānatrayī</i> and has succeeded in advancing the field of Vedanta philosophy.

5.2 Chapter - 2

5.2.1 Analysis on the Basis of Epistemology

In Indian philosophies, *pramāṇa* is the means which can lead to knowledge and serve as one of the core concepts in the Indian epistemological system. The focus of *pramāṇa* is how correct knowledge can be acquired, how one knows, how one doesn't, and to what extent knowledge pertinent about someone or something can be acquired. Here, we present a brief analytical study of the *Prasthānatrayī Svāmīnārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* and the *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of epistemology.

This chapter focuses on the Indian *Pramāṇa* tradition, which is concerned with the means and criteria of valid empirical knowledge and correct cognition. Although all the famous and traditionally accepted *pramāṇas* in the Indian philosophical

systems are analyzed here on the basis of the *Vacanāmṛta* and the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas, such as perception, inference, verbal testimony, analogy, etc. this chapter aims to decipher some unique stars in the sky of epistemology. In this manner, as far as the number of *pramāṇas* is concerned, the *Svāminārāyaṇa* tradition harbors different attitudes. For example, the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya clearly mentions the significance of *pramāṇa* (BSSB-1/1/1, 1/1/3; KeUSB-1/3; BUSB-2/4/5). However, like Svāminārāyaṇa, the Bhāṣyakāra is not bound with the fixed numbers of *pramāṇa*. He averred- “ब्रह्मब्रह्मपरौ प्रमाणशतकैर्मायाऽधिपौ कीर्तितौ” (SSS- *Maṅgalam* – *abhyarthanā*-1).

Along with this, the *prāṇāyāma* of *pramāṇa* also depends on Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman along with the Guru. They are indeed determinant and cause of all *pramāṇa* and *pramā* (knowledge). They are the cause of intellect that obtains knowledge and provides knowledge to a seeker and is knowable. Their grace is indispensable to attain true knowledge. The discussion between logic, *śāstra*, and the Guru also provides a special feature to this chapter. At the end of this chapter, *khyātivāda* of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School is presented as well.

S.No	PRINCIPLES	THE <i>VACANĀMṚTA</i>	THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA
1.	<i>Meyadhīnā mānasiddhiḥ</i>	Parabrahman knows everything about the past, the present, and the future. He doesn't need any means. Means are meant for <i>māyic</i> .	Parabrahman doesn't need the <i>indriyas</i> or sense organs for attaining knowledge since his knowledge is self-proven.

2.	Acceptance of <i>Pramāṇas</i>	Not fixed numbers. In fact, ultimate knowledge is important. Every means of knowledge is important which leads us to the knowledge of Brahma-Parabrahman.	Hundreds of means are welcomed if they are worthy to attain knowledge of Brahman and Parabrahman.
3.	Ultimate source of knowledge	By the grace Brahma-Parabrahman, his <i>indriya</i> and <i>antaḥkaraṇa</i> become divine. Then only he attains the ultimate knowledge.	Akṣarabrahman and Parabrahman along with the Guru, are determinant and the cause of all <i>pramāṇa</i> and <i>pramās</i> (knowledge).
4.	<i>Pramāṇa</i> of Parabrahman in human form	Knowing Parabrahman perfectly means knowing the manifest form of Parabrahman.	Due to Parabrahman's resolution that He incarnates on earth and the seeker becomes able to obtain his true knowledge.
5.	Perception	Parabrahman then divinizes his cognitive and conative senses. So, a devotee gets correct knowledge of Parabrahman and the world.	The <i>Bhāṣyakara</i> says about Parabrahman- behold all the entire creation, animate, inanimate, and whatever else you would like to see – all at

			one place in My (Parabrahman's) body.
6.	Inference	Svāminārāyaṇa was a protagonist both of intellect and intuition but rejected logic as an ultimate means.	He used a superb variety of logic yet asserted that the highest knowledge is beyond suppositional reasoning.
7.	Verbal Testimony	The scriptural testimony is regarded as the best guide for the knowledge of Brahma-Parabrahman.	Scripture-verbal testimony is the most reliable source (<i>pramāṇa</i>) among all the epistemological means.
8.	Guru	The <i>satpuruṣa</i> (Akṣara-Guru) is the scriptures personified, and hence, he alone can unveil the meanings and implied sense of the scriptural words.	Akṣara-Guru is highly extolled both for understating the correct meaning and implications of the scriptures.
9.	Analogy	Used to understand mystical and profound spiritual philosophy.	Helps as a base for a seeker to fulfill his spiritual understanding.
10.	<i>Pramā</i>	Knowledge is understood as definite, doubt-free, truthful, awareness of the thing, episode or concept,	Knowledge, which is characterized by the knowledge of the five entities: <i>jīva</i> , <i>īśvara</i> ,

		especially about the true nature of five ontological realities.	<i>māyā</i> , <i>Brahma</i> , and Parabrahman, as they truly are.
11.	Process of attaining knowledge	When the <i>vr̥tti</i> of the <i>indriyas</i> enter the object, the mind and <i>jīva</i> also go along with the <i>vr̥tti</i> ; then, the object is seen and fully recognized.	Firstly, the <i>indriyas</i> connect with the object, then with the mind resulting in knowledge.
12.	<i>Khyāti</i>	Accepts the erroneous knowledge and worldly things as being real.	We accept <i>cid-acid khyāti</i> in erroneous knowledge.

5.3 Chapter - 3

5.3.1 Analysis on the Basis of Metaphysics

In this chapter, the metaphysics of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School is analyzed based on the *Vacanāmṛta* and the *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas*. Metaphysics is related to the study of the eternal ontological entity or entities in a particular belief system.⁷⁸² *Svāminārāyaṇa* reveals straightforwardly, “From all the Vedas, *Purāṇas*, *Itihāsa* and *Smṛti* scriptures, I have engendered the principle that *jīva*, *māyā*, *īśvara*, Brahman and Parameśvara are all eternal.” (Vac. Gadh. 3/10) *Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* confirms, “जीवेश्वरमायाब्रह्मरूपमुक्तादिसर्वेभ्यः परभूताद् ... अक्षरात्.... परभूतः ...परमात्मा ।”⁷⁸³

In the history of world philosophy, this is indeed a matchless principle of the *Svāminārāyaṇa* School. It has been analyzed as a critical factor in this chapter, which provides elucidation on each entity with its nature, form, and function.

⁷⁸² Brahmadarśandāsa Sādhu, *Vacanāmṛta Rahasya*, op.cit., p.2

⁷⁸³ Sādhu Bhadrēśadāsa, *Mundaka Upaniṣad* 2/1/2,

Moreover, the chapter defines a clear distinction and relation among these ontological entities. The creation, sustenance, and dissolution of the cosmos are discussed, and Parabrahman and Akṣarabrahman elaborated as its cause with critical argumentations. In addition to this, a deep narration of Akṣarabrahman as transcending *māyā* is the most novel contribution to this chapter. We present a brief analytical study of the *Prasthānatrayī Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya* and the *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of metaphysics.

S.N.	PRINCIPLES	THE VACANĀMṚTA	THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA
*	Five eternal ontological entities	Parabrahman Puruṣottama Bhagavān, Akṣarabrahman, <i>māyā</i> , <i>īśvara</i> , and <i>jīva</i> - these five entities are eternal	<i>Jīva</i> , <i>māyā</i> , <i>īśvara</i> , Brahman and Parameśvara are all eternal.
1.	<i>Jīva</i>	The <i>jīva</i> has three bodies: <i>sthūla deha</i> , <i>sūkṣma deha</i> , and <i>kāraṇa deha</i> .	The <i>atman</i> which resides in the body is affected by its three bodies: <i>sthūla deha</i> , <i>sūkṣma deha</i> , and <i>kāraṇa deha</i> , and also with three states of it: <i>jāgrata avasthā</i> , <i>svapna avasthā</i> , and <i>susupti avasthā</i> .
2.	<i>Īśvara</i>	It is known as <i>īśvara</i> due to its significant powers. That Virāṭa Puruṣa is just like this <i>Jīva</i> , and his actions are	<i>Devas</i> fall in the <i>īśvara</i> category.” In addition, Parabrahman creates realms therefore they can

		also similar to that of the <i>jīva</i> .”	enjoy the fruits of their <i>karmas</i> .” Like the <i>jīva</i> the <i>īśvaras</i> also have three bodies. They are involved in the creation of the world.
3.	MĀYĀ	<i>Prakṛti</i> is characterized by the three <i>guṇas</i> , and by both insentience and sentiency. It is eternal, indistinct, the field of all beings and all elements, including <i>mahattattva</i> , and God’s divine power.	<i>Māyā</i> ’s three <i>guṇas</i> ; <i>sāttvika</i> , <i>rājasika</i> , and <i>tāmasikaguṇa</i> , are experienced by all.
4.	Akṣarabrahman	Puruṣottama is greater even than Akṣara, who is greater than all else. Moreover, God - who is Puruṣottama - forever remains present in Akṣaradhāma.	Parabrahman is greater even than Akṣara, the greatest. Parabrahman is entirely present and graciously active through the Akṣara - <i>brahmasvarūpa</i> Guru.
5.	Parabrahman	Thus, the governor of all activities and the lord of all is one Parabrahman. Therefore, God is definitely one, and no one can become like him.	It is not possible that there would be more than one God. Infinite miraculous deeds happen through only one ontologically supreme entity Parabrahman.

5.4 Chapter – 4

5.4.1 Analysis on the Basis of Spiritual Endeavour

This chapter deals with the spiritual endeavor or *sāadhanā* a seeker has to perform in order to attain the ultimate reality. Bhagavān Svāminārāyaṇa and his *gunātīta sādhus* have lived and taught a unique and practical path of spiritual *sāadhanā* that leads to the realization of *ātman*, Brahman, and Paramātmā. We made this *sāadhanā* as our subject matter and analyzed it through the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya in light of the *Vacanāmṛta*. The primary tool described here is a distinction and significance of self-effort and God's grace. The chapter explicitly corroborated it. Then we moved to enunciate the most fundamental factor of the *Svāminārāyaṇa sāadhanā*, *Brahmabhāva*, which includes every spiritual *sāadhanā*. To become *brahmarūpa* and offer *upāsanā* to Parabrahman is the prominent *sāadhanā* of the tradition. Further, we have described *ekāntika dharma* and its components (*dharm*, *jñāna*, *vairāgya*, and *bhakti*). Refuge (*āśraya*), *dīkṣā*, *niyama*, general *sāadhanā*, and atonement were the central points of discussion in this chapter.

Our *sāadhanā* chapter provides a detailed description of the importance of the *Brahmasvarūpa* Guru by which all aspirants can succeed in their spiritual quest and experience the ultimate bliss of God. We, now, present a brief analytical study of the *Prasthānatrayī* Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta* on the basis of spiritual endeavor.

SN	PRINCIPLES	THE VACANĀMṚTA	THE SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA
1.	Grace and Self-Effort	Hence, personal endeavor itself is the	Guru and God's grace is important to apply all other

		greatest of all spiritual endeavors for attaining liberation. One who has such virtues, can attain God's grace.	spiritual endeavors. By their will, an aspirant can achieve everything.
2.	<i>Brahmavidyā</i>	With such understanding of BP, one should develop oneness between one's <i>jivātman</i> and that Brahman and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with Him. With such understanding, <i>brahmajñāna</i> also becomes an unobstructed path to attaining the highest state of enlightenment.	By which Akṣara and Puruṣottama are truly known is called <i>brahmavidyā</i> . By identifying <i>brahmavidyā</i> as the means towards realizing these two ontologically distinct entities, the Akṣarapuruṣottama Doctrine is understood as an expression of <i>brahmavidyā</i> .
3.	Oneness with the Brahman	The <i>jīva</i> realizes, 'My self is Brahman, which transcends and is free from <i>māyā</i> .' If one associates with Brahman through continuous contemplation in this manner, the <i>jīva</i>	<i>Ātmagrihīti</i> , which is known as the firm oneness with the Akṣarabrahman Guru, is the most prominent spiritual endeavor of all spiritual endeavors to complete <i>upāsanā</i> towards God.

		acquires the virtues of Brahman.	
4.	The Role of the Guru	For a person who desires his own liberation, nothing in this world is more blissful than God and the Guru. Therefore, just as a person has <i>ātmabuddhi</i> towards their own body, they should similarly have <i>ātmabuddhi</i> with God and His <i>santa</i> .	All actions, thoughts and intentions of the aspirant are now imbued with a spiritual awareness of the Guru and thus take on a wholly devotional character and spirit. This frees the aspirant of his/ her <i>karmika</i> bondage.
5.	<i>Śaraṇāgati</i> (refuge)	Accepting the firm refuge of God is the single, greatest endeavor amongst all spiritual endeavors for pleasing God.	complete relinquish all <i>dharma</i> s (i.e, duties as conceived by you) and seeking God alone as unfaltering refuge. He shall assuredly release you from all sins.
6.	<i>Upāsanā</i>	All greatness is achieved through the force of the <i>upāsanā</i> of God. Without <i>upāsanā</i> , though, nothing can be accomplished	<i>Upāsanā</i> is a type of devotion. In this devotion, there is constant remembrance of God. That is the root of all endeavors.

7.	<i>Bhakti</i> (Devotion- Worship)	<i>Bhakti</i> , an intense love for God which is devoid of all desires for fruits, and which is accompanied with an understanding of God's greatness.	Intense and singular love towards God coupled with the glory of Him is called <i>bhakti</i> in the scriptures.
9.	<i>Sāadhanā</i> for Daily Life	God is pleased the most by <i>satsaṅga</i> . It alone puts an end to all worldly ties and attachments.	In this way, the <i>mantra</i> shows that through the <i>Satsaṅga</i> of the <i>Brahmasvarūpa</i> Guru, <i>adhyātma vidyā</i> becomes fruitful in true sense.

5.5 Chapter – 5

5.5.1 Analysis on the Basis of Soteriology

Soteriology is the study of the divine accomplishment of the salvation⁷⁸⁴ of humanity. In Indian philosophy, soteriology can be defined as attaining *mokṣa*. This chapter explains the fruit, the ultimate goal of the spiritual endeavors performed by a seeker. Within the Akṣara-Puruṣottama *Darśana*, devotees have a relationship with Akṣara and Puruṣottama in the *sāadhanadaśā* and also after attaining *mukti*. *Mukti* is defined as becoming *Akṣararūpa* and offering *bhakti* to Puruṣottama with *dāsabhāva*. Thus, even in the state of *mukti*, one, upon becoming *brahmarūpa*, continuously offers *upāsanā* to Puruṣottama with *dāsabhāva*.

⁷⁸⁴ Definition of salvation: Oxford, 2nd ed. 1989: "The saving of the soul; the deliverance from sin and its consequences"

Considering it in the background, the chapter discusses the nature of bondage and liberation. *Jīvanmukti* and *videhamukti* have been elucidated. Moreover, by the oneness with Brahman, one does not become Brahman or Parabrahman after becoming a *jīvanmukta* or *videhmukta*. This topic is corroborated with a large series of arguments. The way to the abode (*Arcirādi mārga*), the state of *mukti* in the abode, *brāhmī tanu* (body of a *mukta*), the relation between God and a *mukta* is discussed at length in this chapter. This chapter provides an efficient analysis of those prominent principles regarding soteriology described in the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣya and the *Vacanāmṛta*.

S.N	PRINCIPLES	THE <i>VACANĀMṚTA</i>	THE <i>SVĀMINĀRĀYAṆA BHĀṢYA</i>
1.	<i>Mukti</i>	Only when one constantly associates with Brahman, through contemplation - as previously described - is that attachment broken.	By acquiring this <i>brāhmīsthiti</i> (<i>brahmabhāva</i>) one attains liberation and experiences God's bliss.
2.	Bondage	This <i>māyā</i> of the <i>jīva</i> , i.e., the <i>kāraṇa</i> body, is attached so firmly to the <i>jīva</i> that they cannot be separated by any means whatsoever.	Therefore, true knowledge is hidden due to ignorance in the form of a causal body of <i>māyā</i> .
3.	What is Oneness?	<i>Jīva</i> never becomes Brahman or Parabrahman in any state. The oneness with AB is qualitative oneness only.	This means that the worshipper of the Brahman gains the qualities of Brahman. They do not, however, become

			ontologically one with the worshipped Brahman.
4.	Jīvanamukti	When the devotee has kept their mind at the holy feet of God in this manner, they do not have to die to attain the abode of God - they have attained it while still alive.	When all desires clinging to the heart of one perish, then the mortal becomes immortal and here attains Brahman. The <i>Śruti</i> itself establishes the principle of <i>jīvanamukti</i> .
5.	Videhamukti	We also wish to join the ranks of the <i>Akṣararūpa muktas</i> and go to Akṣaradhāma to forever remain in the service of God with a <i>brahmi tanu</i> .	The <i>brahmarūpa</i> devotee continuously offers <i>upāsanā</i> to God till their death. After their death, he enters the abode of God and gets the divine <i>Brāhmika</i> body by the wish and grace of Him.
6.	<i>Arcirādi Marg</i>	After such an <i>ekāntik bhakta</i> leaves their body and becomes free of all influences of <i>māyā</i> , they attain Akṣaradhāma via <i>Arcirādi marg</i> .	<i>Devayana</i> or <i>arcirādi mārga</i> is the actual way through which the liberated <i>ātman</i> goes to the abode of God.
7.	<i>Upasya-Upasaka Relationship</i>	This devotional relationship between Parabrahman and the liberated <i>ātmans</i> is thus	Despite being similar in appearance to God, <i>muktas</i> are the servant devotees of Parabrahman.

		referred to as the ‘ <i>svāmi-sevaka sambandha</i> ’.	
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6. Ultimate Conclusion

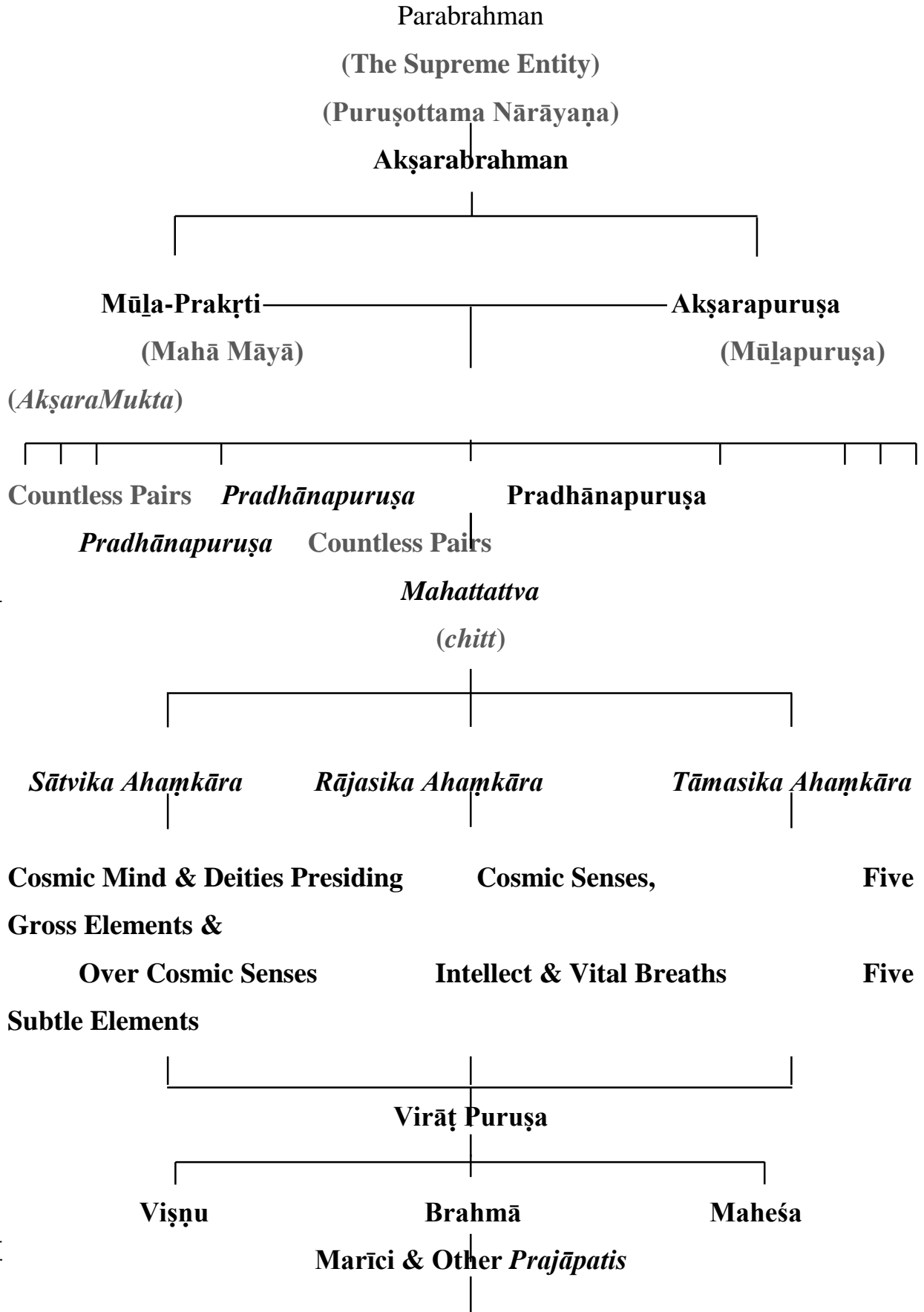
The prominent aim of this study was to analyze the principles narrated in the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* in the light of Svāminārāyaṇa’s *Vacanāmṛta*, since the *Vacanāmṛta* is a principal sacred text of the *Svāminārāyaṇa Sampradāya* (religious tradition) delivered by Parabrahman Svāminārāyaṇa himself. After two hundred years of Svāminārāyaṇa’s time, the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyam* were authored by Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa. So far, after providing the first introductory chapter, we have analyzed and assessed the main doctrinal interpretations provided within the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* and the *Vacanāmṛta* according to these four main factors: epistemology, metaphysics, spiritual endeavors, and soteriology.

The current study accumulated several factors where both scriptures propagate the same idea. After analyzing a number of examples, the findings clearly suggest that the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣya* thoroughly follows the *Vacanāmṛta*’s principles. We can conclude by saying that Sādhu Bhadreśadāsa has put the philosophical principle of Svāminārāyaṇa found in the *Vacanāmṛta*, in a scholastic way. In this way, after following the proper vedāntika process and analysis, we find that the Svāminārāyaṇa Bhāṣyas follow the principles of the *Vacanāmṛta*. In other words, in both scriptures, the principles are the same. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis, which echoed earlier that there is no relation between these two scriptures.

Moreover, readers will be glad to know that for the first time in the history of the Indian philosophy, the *Prasthānatrayī-Svāminārāyaṇa-Bhāṣyas* were analyzed on the foundation, the *Vacanāmṛta*, on which the entire *saṃpradāya* is standing. The

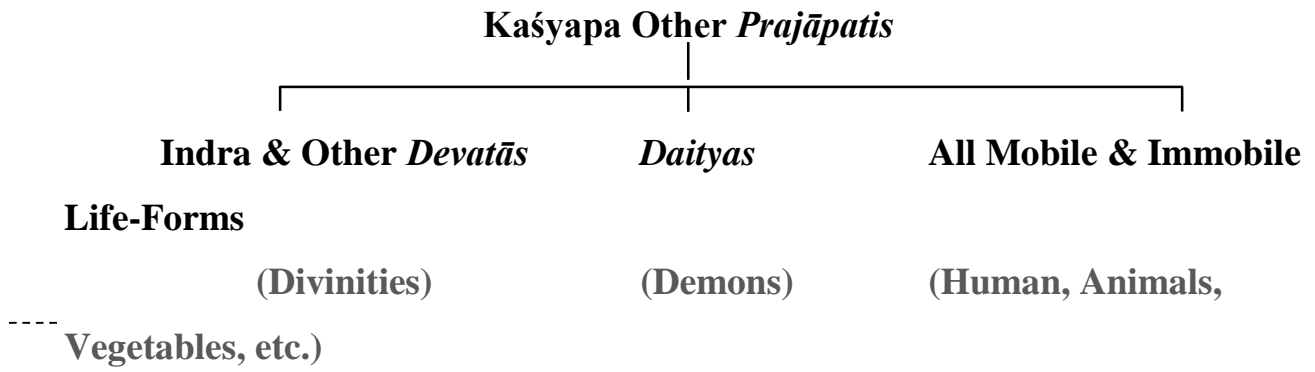
findings of this study have many important implications for those who intend to conduct research on the *Svāminārāyaṇa-Darśana*.

THE PROCTOLOGICAL PROCESS [UTPATTI SARGA]

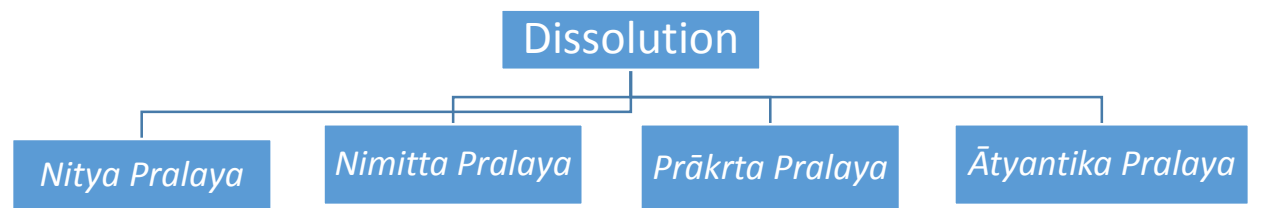


Īśvar

Jiv



Four types of Dissolutions (Pralays)



Fourteen lokas and their inhabitants within each brahmāṇḍa

	<i>Loka</i>	Inhabitants
14	Satyaloka / Brahmaloka	Brahma
13	Tapaloka	
12	Janaloka	Bṛghu and other sages
11	Maharloka	Aryam and other ancestral divinities
10	Svargaloka / Indraloka	Indra and other <i>devatas</i>
9	Bhuvarloka	Impure <i>devatas</i>
8	Mṛtyuloka	Humans
7	Atala	
6	Vitala	<i>Daityas</i>
5	Sutala	
4	Talatala	
3	Mahatala	Nocturnal creatures
2	Rasatala	
1	Pātāla	Serpents